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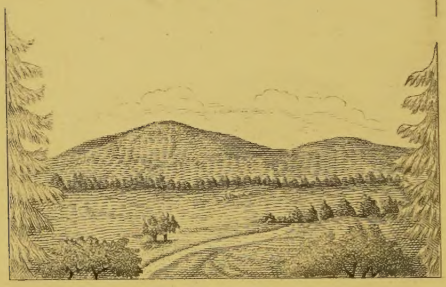

NIGHT CLUB

BY KATHARINE BRUSH

GLITTER

LITTLE SINS

NIGHT CLUB

NIGHT CLUB

KATHARINE BRUSH

MINTON, BALCH & COMPANY
NEW YORK 1929

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NIGHT CLUB

THE LONG YOUNG DREAMS

THE room in which the groom and the best man waited was small, so small it seemed a sort of closet; an effect materially heightened by the numerous gowns of choir-boys which drooped limp from hooks on all sides. Two square feet of summer sky hung in a frame of window high on one wall. This, and the crimson carpet, were the only spots of color in the room. The rest was white and black; white walls, black and white robes—and the two dark-clad young men with pale, strained faces . . .

Outside, beyond the little door, an organ sang softly of the sacred and beautiful thing about to be. Its song reached the pair in the vestry-room; a faint throbbing hum that suggested even while it drowned the rustle of silks, the whisper of lips, the tread of the ushers' feet, down and back, down and back. There was a flowery fragrance too in the vestry-room. The ghosts of many, many flowers had crept in, ghost-like, through the cracks in the door and through the keyhole.

"Time?" said the fatter of the two young men. Briefly. Some hours ago he had given up using any more words per sentence than were requisite.

He was the groom.

The other young man consulted his watch. "Twenty-five after. Just."

"Five minutes more."

"Yeah."

"Lord!"

You have been told which was the groom. And it is well, for you would never have been able to determine, seeing them. Both had a hunted look. Both mopped their foreheads. Both paced the floor, with frequent solemn collisions. The best man was as restless and as haggard as the groom; and in view of the fact that he had been a best man nine times since graduation—that, indeed, he was one of those young men who appear to have been designed by nature for the job—this was a curious and a noteworthy thing.

The groom's name was Thomas Theodore Jennings, Third. But his real name was Tuck. He had played guard on the football team, and was in business with his father, and his eyes were blue, and his barber had begun to mumble to him about scalp treatments. And that's all. There isn't any more.

The best man was Gregory Jordan. By avocation a broker. (Mallard, Fitzgerald and Co., 30 Wall Street.) By profession, a chap all his friends always wanted all their friends to meet. You know him. You know a dozen of him. Tall. Good-looking. Given to smiling, and endowed with the teeth for it. Fond of the fox-trot, good clothes, three no-trump and four o'clock in the morning. Expert at making mothers feel young, kid sisters old, and married women certain that

secretly he wished they were not married. Age: twenty-six. Alma Mater: Amherst. Popularity: there isn't any word.

Tuck and Gregory had roomed together for three campus years. They had picked out long rambling letters to each other, one-fingered, on office typewriters, for two years more; and reunited with wild particular glee at class reunions. Then Tuck had written a special delivery, one of those special special deliveries beginning, "Well, old man, everything set, June twelfth is the Big Day, and I'm counting on you to see me through."

And Gregory had wired, "Paralysis couldn't stop me. Morning, noon or night clothes? Let me know while still conscious. Cheers. Greg." And he had bought a silver tea-service and sent it to the bride. And he had bought a new silk hat because the night of the last wedding they had packed champagne in cracked ice in his old one. And he had traveled twelve hundred miles . . .

And here they were.

After the immemorial manner of grooms, Tuck was concerned about the ring. Thrice in the last ten minutes he had inquired as to its safety and whereabouts, and now he inquired again, in a hoarse pathetic voice.

"I've got it, don't worry," said Gregory.

He produced it. It was a circle of diamonds set in platinum. Both young men regarded it intently.

Gregory laid it in the palm of his hand and touched it with a thoughtful finger-tip. "Does it fit her?"

The groom looked indignant. "Fit her? *'Course* it fits her!" He paced toward the window, two paces, then wheeled, looking panic-stricken. "What makes you think it doesn't fit her, for the love of—"

"I don't," said Gregory. He added slowly, with his eyes still fixed on the wedding-ring, "Only it's so—little."

Tuck, reassured, resumed his pacing. "It fits, all right. We tried it on. Naturally. Put it away, Greg. You might drop it." This idea took instant fierce grip on his imagination. "What if you dropped it?" he demanded, wheeling again. "What if you dropped it right now and it rolled under something? We'd *never* find it! We wouldn't have time! Put it away."

Gregory already had.

"How many minutes more?" Tuck then wanted to know.

"Three."

A faint bleat of anguish from the groom.

"Three and a quarter," Gregory supplemented helpfully.

Tuck sat down on a very small chair and glowered ahead of him.

"What if she changes her mind," he muttered, "at the last minute? You're always reading——"

Gregory's back was turned. He was ostensibly interested in a framed placard headed "Notice to Choristers."

"She won't," he said. Quite simply.

"She——" began Tuck. But he never finished. The

word had hardly left his tongue when he bounded from the chair and stood rigid and feverish-eyed, staring.

The organ in the church outside, with sudden splendid chords, was proving the truth of Gregory's statement.

Miss Gloria Varney of Regis, Alabama, hadn't changed her mind. She was coming.

It is strange that in major moments we can find only very minor things to say. Gregory in this moment could find nothing to say at all except, "Confounded watch must've been slow." He was thinking, "No! No! Oh, my *God—no!*" But that was not a thing to say. That was a thing to keep to himself, forever. Forever.

He looked at Tuck. Tuck was still standing there, muscle-bound, his mouth working. The sight gave Gregory a certain desperate calm. It seemed to him all at once that they tarried unpardonably; that the organ had been sending forth those slow heart-twisting chords for a long time, for as long as he could remember. He threw an arm across Tuck's shoulders.

"All right, old kid," he said gently, lightly. "Let's go."

Tuck nodded, and his shoulders straightened. Gregory stood away. Louder now, the organ in the church outside. Measured, mighty music, imperative, inexorable: *Hmmm—hmmm—hm hmmm* . . .

Tuck was abruptly active, frantically active. He wiped his forehead on—I regret to say—a choir-boy's surplice, more accessible than his handkerchief. He

passed the palms of his hands over the damp slick of his hair. He tweaked his tie and jerked at the lapels of his cutaway coat. He quavered, "Ring?" Cleared his throat, said gruffly, "Got the ring?" Gregory had it. "Come on," commanded Tuck. And two who had lived a century in two bars of *Lohengrin* passed through the little white door.

The church was a vast mass of blossoms, wee blossoms that were flowers, large ones that were people's faces. The large blossoms were turned to the left, all of them, as though a wind breathed on them and sent them so. Everybody was standing. Gregory glimpsed Tuck's mother and father. Theirs alone of all the faces were not turned. They were looking at Tuck.

Hmmm—hmmm—hm hmmm . . .

Gloria's mother stood near them. She had a gray lace dress on, and a big hat. Petite and pretty and young, Gloria's mother, the kind of mother who made you sure her daughter would never grow fat or wear run-over heels. Gloria's brother with her. Elliott Varney, Junior, aged twelve. In a collar apparently tight for him, for he tugged at it with his forefinger.

Hmmm—hmmm—hm hmmmmm hm . . .

Candlelight gleamed on the bishop's bald head. The scent of the flowers was suffocating, dizzying. Only two of the thin, tall, stained-glass windows were open; not enough. Gregory glanced sideways. Tuck seemed tranquil now. He stood very straight and steady and still, chin lifted. Tuck, good old Tuck, salt of the earth.

Hm hmmm—hmmm—hm—hmmm . . .

Bridesmaids in orchid taffeta approached through the lane of herded, watching people. Rhythmically they moved, dragging the toes of their silver shoes at every step a little. They were like dolls . . . Two bridesmaids. Then, at a careful distance, two more. Then a third pair. Then an ambling, beaming cherub in a white suit and socks, bearing a white satin pillow. Then two beruffled five-year-old flower girls. Then——

Gregory dropped his eyes.

A moment, and the music faded, changed. Faintly now it sighed: music to make you dream, to make you weep and tremble. The church was hushed. Audience, bridesmaids, ushers were still, fixed and still as the flower-banked altar or as the painted pews.

Now the voice of the bishop, deep, sonorous, dramatic: "*Dearrr-ly* belovèd——"

Gregory raised his eyes. She was very near him. So near he could have touched her, so near he could see the almost invisible quivering of the lilies-of-the-valley she held. She was very tiny: shoulder-high to Tuck. Beyond his stalwart black sleeve her profile was marble, exquisitely chiseled, motionless and cold. Only the curving lashes, and the scarlet arrow of the lips, had warmth.

Gloria . . .

They were seniors at college, he and Tuck, living together in a bright, bannered room in an ivy-clad graystone house. There had been a vacation seventeen days long; it was evening of the seventeenth day. Gregory

had been back for an hour or two. He had unpacked, undressed, donned pajamas and bath-robe, blown the dust off a text-book, opened it, sighed abysmally, and slapped it shut. He had started the phonograph on the window-seat. He lay stretched out in a chair near by, smoking a pipe.

Tuck entered. He booted the door open and romped in, uttering cries. He dropped two belabeled suitcases, shook hands with Gregory, and pummeled him. Then he squared off, parted a raccoon coat and a suit coat, and indicated a vest on which a fraternity pin had been but now was not, saying dramatically, "Gone!"

Gregory surveyed the vest, head on one side. "You're right," he said. "It is gone. Gone where?"

"Gone," said Tuck, "to Gloria."

That was the first time Gregory ever had heard of her.

During the rest of the year he heard of little else. The room became a gallery of her photographs. The morning mail daily included one of her corpulent mauve letters. Portions of these were read aloud to Gregory, with explanations and interpretations; he came to know her really rather well.

He knew her age. He knew her favorite slang, and the make of her roadster, and just how fast and far it would go on a gallon of gasoline. He knew what flowers she liked, and what candy, and all about the time she had almost died of typhoid pneumonia. Her face was as familiar to him as a relative's; he could have drawn her features blindfolded. The level dark

brows. The slanting eyes. The little, short, somehow snobbish nose. The upper lip that was two petals and the lower lip that was one. The straight bobbed black hair.

He knew that the town where she lived had eighteen thousand inhabitants, approximately half of whom toiled in the mills of her father. She was the Little Girl of the Big House, the slim and careless princess of the realm. Whenever she had a cold, or entertained a guest, or gave a party, or went away, the local paper broke out into head-lines. Whenever she came back, women copied her clothes.

Sometimes Gregory wrote "Hello there!" post-scripts on the ends of Tuck's letters to her. Sometimes he idly commanded Tuck to "Give her my love." Once, when Tuck was ill in the college infirmary, he talked with her on very long-distance. She had a little drawly Alabama voice, rather frightened.

"Oh, *Greg!* It isn't *danger*ous, Greg?" . . . At the end she cried, "Listen!" and Gregory listened, and there was a tiny lip sound, faint and far-away. "That was a kiss," said Gloria. "Fo' Tuck. You tell him."

But he never saw her until two years later. Until the day before her wedding-day.

She was standing beside Tuck on the station platform eying the sliding windows of the train. She wore a white flannel suit, very snug, very smart, and a little felt off-the-face hat. Her right hand was fisted in a pocket, small-girlishly; the left hand held a silky

Pekinese dog, like a brown bouquet against her shoulder. It could be no other. The slanting eyes, the mouth, the brows, were Gloria's—in color.

"Sa-ay!" thought Gregory. "I never *realized*——"

As immediate background to the picture, there was a crouching motor-car, stuffed with girls and men, parked beyond at the outer edge of the platform. One of the girls and two of the men sat on the top, which was folded down, and a second girl perched on a third man's knees, and a fourth man lounged with his golf-hosed legs dangling over the door of the car, and the whole effect was exceedingly cheerful and nonchalant and young.

Gregory stepped off the train . . .

She used marvelous perfume. Dim, yet pervasive. Marvelous. Her eyes were deeply blue, blue as heaven, and her smile was a lazy slight parting of the lips.

"So this is Greg!" she said.

But it didn't matter, it never had mattered, it never would matter until she was forty or more, what Gloria *said*.

All the morning—his train had arrived at nine—he wondered dully what was wrong with him. He wondered why he felt by turns happy and heart-broken; why he kept thinking, "I ought not to have come." In effect he stood off and watched himself, with amazement and chagrin. He saw himself look too often at Gloria. He saw himself begin to smile when she began to speak, and laugh too loud and long when she had spoken. He saw himself morose and bored in her ab-

sence; waxing loquacious, boisterous—almost showing off—when she was there.

The diagnosis was obvious. Even to a gentleman who, in twenty-six years, never had been more than a very little in love, it was obvious. But Gregory would not believe it. His mind refused to convict him of such crass and utter folly, such unthinkable disloyalty to Tuck.

Then the bridal party held rehearsal in the echoing empty church—and he had to believe it. He saw Gloria on her father's arm come down the aisle to Tuck; and things swam before his eyes, and he knew.

He went back to the big cool taffeta guest-room and shut the door, and in the mirror between the tall electric lamps he talked to himself. "You ass! What's the matter with you? Haven't you got any sense?"

The answer was simply, "No." And to that there wasn't any answer.

He resolved to stay away from Gloria; and so heroically did he keep this resolution that about four o'clock in the afternoon she dropped down on a divan beside him, mumuring, "Best man, why aren't you being *at all* nice to the bride?"

They were on a spacious awninged porch. The porch was full of pretty girls tying sashes of white ribbon around wedding-cake boxes, and of young men who obediently put their fingers on the knots. Somebody played a piano in the room adjoining. One couple danced. Tuck juggled a cocktail shaker.

"I didn't know I wasn't," said Gregory.

Gloria ignored that. "Nice to the bride," she said firmly, "is one of the things everybody has to be. Like kind to the sick." Leaning forward a little, she regarded him over one shoulder, and gave her lazy charming smile. "Greg Jo'dan, don't you know that if you don't like me, Tuck isn't ever going to fo'give *either* of us?"

"But I do like you."

"Really?"

"Really. Immensely."

"I wondered," said Gloria. "I thought you did, and then I thought you didn't——" Her voice trailed off dreamily. Her eyes forsook Gregory and focused with seeming concentration upon the couple fox-trotting close by. Gregory would have sworn her next remark would be relative to them. But it wasn't. She said, "It's funny, meeting you at last. Isn't it?"

"Isn't it!"

"It's funny," she continued, "because I knew all about you—and now I don't know anything about you."

Gregory nodded comprehendingly. He also felt that way.

"So tell me about you," said Gloria.

Then her hand was in his, a silky cool little hand that tugged. "Come on," she commanded, rising. "Come and help me open some presents the expressman just brought. They're in wooden boxes, so I can't alone, and everybody's busy but you. Besides, we can talk."

They left the sun-porch hand in hand, Gloria a pilot's

step in the lead. Four times on their way through the dim beautiful house they were halted. Once by a telephone call for Gloria. Once by Gloria's mother, who wailed distractedly in passing, "Honey, where on *earth* did I put that list?" Once by the butler, to ask if the detective on guard in the room where the presents were might smoke while he guarded. Once by a maid who desired to know whether the silver evening gown with the orange flower should go into one of the trunks or one of the suitcases . . .

"This getting married!" sighed Gloria.

"Quite a chore, isn't it?" Gregory agreed.

"Terrific."

She was pensive, and added after a moment, "Tuck's sweet, though, don't you think?"

"Say!" began Gregory.

He was still declaiming on the manifold merits of Tuck when they reached their destination. This was a large room at the end of the house, used ordinarily by Gloria's young brother as a club-room for himself and kindred spirits. The club (it was called the N. W. A.—"No Wimmin Admited") had been compelled, to its unanimous vexation, to seek temporary quarters somewhere else. In the room there was a tremendous welter of demolished boxes, shredded paper, excelsior, ribbon, string, all over the floor; and a pile of unopened boxes and crates towering above that welter.

"Poor little girl!" said Gregory, looking in from the threshold. "Friendless and neglected—aren't you? It's a shame!" He waded in. "Mind if I take my coat off?"

"No, do," she directed, following. "Let's see, now. You'll find a hammer and things somewhere round ——"

Then for fifteen minutes there was pounding and banging and the horrid squeak of nails being yanked from wood. Gregory grew warm. His face reddened under its handsome tan, his hair developed surprising tight ringlets. His broadcloth shirt clung to his back and shoulders. He looked less impeccable than usual—and more magnificent.

Gloria sat on an upturned empty china barrel and watched, saying little.

He was intensely conscious of her eyes. Because of them he tried to curb his hair's unruliness by plowing through it often with his fingers. Because of them he refrained from loosening his collar; from uttering the oaths and making the faces that normally attend the extraction of obstinate nails. Under that steady blue gaze he rejoiced in his strength. It pleased him to handle heavy crates as if they were toys, to pry up thick boards with the effortless air of one lifting crust from a pie . . .

"You've never tried it, have you?" remarked Gloria suddenly.

He looked up at her; sat back on his heels, that he might look at her the better. "Tried what?"

"Getting married."

"Oh. No. Not yet."

"I wonder why you haven't," Gloria mused.

She was very small and slender on the big barrel;

very picturesque. She leaned backward a trifle, bracing herself on one hand.

"Little thing," thought Gregory. "*Little* thing."

"Tuck says," she went on, "that you've never even been in love, as far as he knows. I mean, really in love."

"Tuck is right."

"And you wouldn't get married without being really in love, would you?"

"Why, no. Would you?"

"I reckon not," said Gloria listlessly.

She slid from the barrel and wandered over to the corner where Gregory had placed the presents as he unearthed them. She stood there, her back toward him, her hands on her hips, surveying the display. For a minute or more she stood there. Once she leaned down and picked up a plate and examined the back of it. Once she said, indicating with her slipper-toe a plump pottery lamp, "Why do second cousins always have atrocious taste?"

When she turned finally, she held a cloisonné boudoir clock, an exquisite thing, in her hands. And she was smiling.

"Speaking of love," she murmured, "a very-long-time-ago flame of mine sent me this. Jim Gibson. From Memphis. He was the only man I ever really cared much about—except Tuck, of course." She paused, and her eyes went direct to Gregory's. "Isn't it odd?" she observed. "He looked like you."

She set the clock down and slipped the card that belonged to it into her pocket. "Go on," she said. "Open

some others." And then, curiously, "Why are you looking at me that funny way?"

"I was thinking."

"Thinking what?"

"Oh, that you're—different from most brides."

"Calmer, do you mean?" She smiled her slight, light smile. "Most brides are happy," she told him simply.

Then her eyes grew startled, grew ashamed. One hand flew to press against her lips, and she shook her head slowly, staring at him. "I *didn't* say it," she said, like a child.

"I—didn't hear you," said Gregory.

During the rest of their sojourn in the room of the excelsior and sawdust they discussed very bravely and brightly the maid of honor, Amherst, the possibility of rain on the morrow, the presents they unpacked, and a dozen other sane, safe things . . .

There was dancing that evening. In the low stucco club-house of the Regis Country Club, there was what the Regis *News* would be sure to call a gay and brilliant gathering. And certainly it was gay, with its Japanese lanterns, its laughter, its glittering gowns. Certainly it was brilliant. A "from" party. Supper from Birmingham. Beverages from Cuba. Band from Africa via New Orleans. Guests from here and there, chiefly there.

Gregory was the perfect best man. He did all the things he should have done. He danced with all the ladies he should have danced with. He saw to it that elderly aunts had ices, that wall-flowers were plucked

at least occasionally, that Tuck every hour or so donned a fresh collar from a bundle brought from the house for that purpose. He did not drink too much, though almost everyone else did and he wanted to more, he was sure, than any of them.

He danced five times with Gloria. The first time he said, "You're looking very lovely this evening," and she said, "That's sweet of you," and then somebody or other cut in. The second time, somebody cut before he could say anything at all. The third time Gloria said, "Greg, do me a favor—you're the only one who seems to be taking any responsibility for this party—go and tell the orchestra to play sho'ter dances and mo' of them, won't you, please?" The fourth time she thanked him for having done so.

The fifth time he said teasingly, "Such popularity must be deserved! Ten steps is the farthest you've danced with any one man at any time all evening. I know. I've been watching you."

And she answered, dimpling, "I told you everybody had to be nice to the bri—" And another pair of black broadcloth arms appeared and snatched her away.

Gregory spoke truly. He had indeed been watching her. Over the powdered shoulders of dowagers and débutantes his eyes had followed her everywhere. He knew where she was always. And with whom. He counted the number of times Tuck danced with her, and noted Tuck's happiness, his tenderness, his glow—and was sorry for Tuck, knowing what he knew, achingly sorry—but not so sorry as he was for Gregory Jor-

dan, who had found the little girl of his long young dreams only after she was lost to him.

Toward one o'clock he sensed from afar that Gloria was becoming very weary. Her smiles, her responses were mechanical now. Her feet moved as if the jazz pulled them with strings; as if without the jazz they could not stir. Once he saw her close her eyes and press her fingers against her temples, hard.

He sought out Tuck. "Gloria's dog-tired," he said. "She ought to go home."

"How can she? It's her party."

"I know. But everybody'd understand."

Tuck's glance searched the floor and discovered his fiancée, dancing with one of the ushers at the far end. "I asked her half an hour ago if she was tired," he said. "She vowed she wasn't."

"But you can tell she is, just to watch her."

Tuck watched her an instant; then he left Gregory and made his way through the churning, spinning couples to her side. They danced half the length of the room, Tuck leaning back, looked down, pleading, Gloria resolutely shaking her dark cropped head. At the doorway where the stags clustered, he was called upon to surrender her, and did.

He returned, frowning, to Gregory. "She won't budge."

Gloria and her partner danced by. She threw them a kiss on a finger-tip.

"You talk to her," suggested Tuck.

"What good——"

"Go on. Try."

Gregory cut in.

"I absolutely and positively will not," she said at once, before he could speak.

"Why not, Gloria? You're tired——"

"I'm dead. But I won't go home till they play 'No Place Like Home'—and even then I may not. After tonight," said Gloria, and her voice was hardly more than a breath against his cheek, "I'll be a married woman. Someone all the married men very politely dance with because I play bridge with their wives, or they play golf with my husband, or something. Tonight's the last night I'll ever be a *girl*—and I'm going to make it last as long as I can. Run away, Billy," she added pleasantly to a youth who desired to relieve Gregory. "Later."

"Thanks for that," Gregory said.

"Dance toward the door, Greg, and we'll go outside a minute. I need air—and quiet."

"I'd better get Tuck," he began punctiliously. "People might——"

"And a chance to cry," concluded Gloria. The hand that Gregory's hand clasped tightened spasmodically. She let her head drop back, and her eyes were wide and dark and imperious in their feathery frames. "Oh, *mind* me," she cried. "Stop arguing! Tonight—what do I care about *people*?"

They danced toward the door in silence.

The porch outside was full of dusk and shadow; full of blurred couples, wheeling, whispering; heady with

romance. The music that came from the ballroom had lost its brass in transit; it was sheer song, plaint of the heart and the pulses. Here and there above the stone railing cigarettes made hot red dots in the dark. A girl laughed a soft little flattered laugh, like three notes on a violin.

They went down the wide steps to the driveway, and crossed to the other side. The sod of a putting green caressed their feet.

"Careful of the holes," Gregory warned, and took her arm. The feel of it, warm and round and satiny, was intoxication. He kept his eyes on the ground until the putting green was passed. Then he scrutinized Gloria obliquely. "You're not really going to cry, are you?" he queried.

Her face was lifted up; given to the perfumed cool of the little wind. Her eyes were lifted. "Ol' yellow moon," she sighed. And answered him in a voice suddenly reckless, defiant. "I might. I might do anything——

"Feeling the way I feel," she added, low.

Their feet had led them up a small slope and on to the first tee of the golf-links. Gloria sat down on a wooden bench and rested her head against the long-legged sand-box that stood beside it.

"I don't know why I tell you things, Greg," she observed. "You're the last person on earth I ought to tell—certain things to. I don't know you at all, to begin with. And you're Tuck's best friend."

Gregory was silent.

"I told you something this afternoon," Gloria said after a pause.

He nodded. "Yes."

"Of co'se I took it back. But you knew it was true, didn't you?"

"I suppose I did."

Gloria's fingers were toying with a gold vanity-case in her lap. She held it up and twisted it tight on its chain and watched it untwist. "I don't love him," she said shortly, sorrowfully. "You might as well know."

It was impossible to refute a statement uttered in that tone and with that manner. But Gregory, to his credit, made an attempt.

"It's your mood, I think, Gloria," he said. "It's natural. You've had a darn good time all your life, and dozens of men to play around with, and the idea of settling down with just one man dismays you a little, now that it's so near. You've suddenly decided it was pretty good fun to be single—to be a girl, as you said a minute ago. You've decided you won't like being a married woman nearly so well—and since Tuck's the fellow who's making you one, you've decided you don't like *him.*"

So earnestly had he said these things that he almost had convinced himself. He felt wise, and helpful, and brotherly. He squeezed Gloria's hand, a brotherly squeeze.

"It's all right," he assured her. "Don't let it worry you. Tuck is one of the grandest guys God ever made, and you can't help loving him, unless—" He stopped.

Scowled. He was still the brother, struck with a new thought. "There isn't anybody you like better, is there?"

"There wasn't," said Gloria.

In a flash he was himself again. Gregory Jordan, deeply in love, terribly in love. His heart beat a tom-tom against his chest. His hands grew damp. He could not look at Gloria. He looked at the ground. Perceiving a pebble, pearly under the moon, he picked it up and threw it. What did she mean? Did she mean— *Did she?*

"And you," said Gloria slowly and with conviction, "feel the same way."

"Yes," he said.

He straightened up, and Gloria straightened, and for an age-long minute they stared at each other, too moved to speak, suddenly too appalled to move. Then Gregory's hands reached out swiftly . . . only to fall limp, hopeless, between his knees. He clenched them together, and brought them up and rested his forehead on them.

"Oh, darling," he whispered. "Gloria——"

He remained thus for some time. Gloria sat very quietly beside him. His lids were lowered, but he could see her. Gloria. Wrapped with moonlight. Silver girl, girl of dreams . . .

"If you don't love him, why are you marrying him?" he asked at last wearily. "Tell me that."

Her voice was small and husky and inexpressibly sad. "I didn't realize I didn't love him—until today.

I'm awfully fond of him, and I like to be with him—he's always been my buddy, sort of—" She hesitated. "I thought that if there was anything more, then I must be incapable of feeling it. I never had felt it, you see, except just a little bit once. Until today," she repeated.

Gregory gave a muffled, wordless exclamation. He leaped up and began to stalk around the tee, his fists deep dug in his dinner coat pockets . . . Presently he came back to stand confronting Gloria; he seized her wrists and pulled her to her feet.

"Look here," he said hoarsely, savagely. "Don't say such things. You *do* love him! He's—why, Gloria, there never was anybody like him, never! He's square, he's splendid, he's—everything. And I'm nothing. I amount to nothing. You don't know. You don't know me. You don't know *one single thing* about me except what he——"

"I don't need to," said Gloria.

There was stamped upon his memory, ineradicably, a picture of her as she looked in that timeless split-second; her face like a pale heart lifted to his face; her dark hair blown by the artist wind forward against her cheeks. . . . He groaned, and shut his eyes and his mind, and caught her close.

He thought wildly, "I never will let her go. Never. Never." Over and over he thought that, holding her as though in truth he never would, kissing her lashes, her throat, her lips.

She was crying when at last he raised his head and

looked at her. He could feel her tears, moist on his own cheek.

"Dearest. Don't," he said shakenly.

"I can't help it. I just can't help it! Oh, Greg, why didn't you ever come—till it was too late?"

The last two words stabbed them both like cruel, quick knives. Once more they stared dumbly at each other. Then Gregory felt Gloria's slim taut body relax and soften in the clasp of his arms. He felt her mouth, like a blossom brushed across his mouth.

"It *isn't* too late," said Gloria. Of a sudden fiercely she clung to him. "It isn't too late! It isn't tomorrow, Greg—it's *tonight!* Listen. Listen, darling. Nothing matters but this, does it? Nothing. Nobody. Oh, don't you love me enough so that nobody matters? Enough to forget that there *is* anybody but just you and me?"

He loved her, in that moment, quite that much. He was as excited as she, as mad, as utterly unthinking and uncaring. Here was his girl. Here was his happiness. Here in his arms were all the things that all his life he had sought. *Now he would keep them.*

"Gloria," he whispered. "Gloria. Let's not go back. Let's find your little car—right now—and *never* go back——"

"Yes! Let's!" she answered breathlessly.

But they had to go back, for a moment at least. The key to Gloria's little car was in Tuck's pocket.

Their recollection of this fact sobered them both.

"I'll get it, all right," Gloria said. "I'll tell him you're taking me home." But her tone was flat; a mono-

tone. And when he kissed her again, some of the ecstasy was lost.

They started for the club-house. Slowly they went, stumbling a little, holding fast to one another's hands. Down the grassy slope from the tee. Around the rim of the putting green. Across the drive . . . Gregory spoke not at all; he had begun to think again.

Gloria spoke only once. "Those saxophones," she murmured, shivering. "They *laugh* so."

At the foot of the porch steps they simultaneously halted, and faced each other, and waited. It was as though each expected the other to say something. But neither did. After an instant their hands fell apart and Gloria led the way into the club-house.

Tuck was standing in the doorway where the stags kept vigil; standing somewhat apart from them, beaming benignly upon everybody. Apparently he had danced lately, for his face was flushed and he patted it with a damp, limp handful of handkerchief. At the approach of his bride and his best man, he grinned more widely, and thrust the handkerchief into a rear pocket.

"Well," he said. "What ho! And where have *you* been?"

"Were you worried?" asked Gloria lightly, oh, so lightly.

"Worried sick! I thought you'd eloped or something!"

This seemed to him funny, and he chuckled, looking with twinkling, fond blue eyes from one to the other.

("Oh, God," thought Gregory. "Oh, God!")

"We took a little walk," explained Gloria. "I thought the air might make me feel better. But"—she flashed a glance at Gregory, as if only from him could she gain the courage to go on—"but it hasn't. I reckon you were right, Tuck. I'd better go home and—get some sleep."

Tuck was instantly grave, solicitous. "Of course, baby," he said. "We'll go this minute. Get your wrap. I'll wait right here."

Gregory thought, *"Now."* He thought frantically, "Oh, she won't, she can't!" He tried to speak, to keep her from speaking; but something choked him. He stood mute.

"Wouldn't it be better," Gloria said, "if Greg drove me over to the house? You and I shouldn't both leave the party, do you think? It's our party—and there are lots of relatives and things you haven't been nice to yet." Her voice was becoming more natural, her mien more composed, with every word. She held out her hand, palm upward. She even smiled. "Give us the key, honey. The key to the car."

Tuck explored his pockets. Immediately. Without hesitation. "Sure," he agreed. "That's the thing to do." He handed the key not to Gloria, but to Gregory; and grinned his big grin. "Don't drive too fast, young fella," he commanded jovially. "You've got a pretty precious cargo, remember that."

Gregory mumbled that he would remember that. His fingers closed over the key.

"Tell Mother—" began Gloria. And shook her

head. "No. I'll see her myself. I want to say—good night to her."

"She's over there." Tuck indicated a group in a distant corner. "Come on," he added, "I'll go with you."

"Wait for me in the car, Greg," said Gloria over her shoulder. Pale she was, he noticed. Deathly pale . . .

He stood quite still in the doorway and watched them cross the room. The band was at rest, the floor was empty now; he had an unobstructed view. There went Gloria. Gloria, whom he loved. There went Tuck, who loved and trusted him. "I thought you'd eloped or something!" Tuck had said that, and laughed. *Laughed.* And his fond eyes, going from one to the other, had said, "Isn't Greg a wonder, Gloria? Haven't I got a marvelous girl, Greg? Didn't I always tell you, both of you?"

A great sob rose in Gregory's throat. He whirled blindly—and almost, not quite, collided with the red-headed bridesmaid.

The red-headed bridesmaid was named Marion something, and she hailed from Washington, D. C. She had a slight, sweet lisp and beautiful legs and a heart like a stag hotel. All day long and half this glamorous night she had striven to interest Gregory, who appeared to her to be the ideal tenant. All day long she had talked for his benefit, smiled and been vivacious for his benefit. This evening she had cast aside the blue dress, which was newer, in favor of the green dress, which was lower, and spent an hour and twenty minutes on her coiffure—for his benefit. She deserved

success. And she no doubt now believed that success was hers; for Gregory greeted her with an enthusiasm that, in view of his marked indifference up to this point, would have amazed a maiden more astute and less vain of her charms than was the red-headed bridesmaid named Marion something.

"Hel*lo,* there!" he exclaimed, and seized both her hands. "This is luck. You're just the little girl I'm looking for!"

"Oh, truly? How nice!"

"I think it's time you danced with me," said Gregory. "Or better yet"—he squeezed her hands, looked deep into her eyes—"or better yet—let's go outside and count the stars, shall we?"

"I've already counted them," Marion giggled. "But maybe I missed one or two."

They went outside.

"Let's go sit in a car," Gregory suggested when they reached the foot of the steps. "I know a grand car, with a flask in its pocket——"

"Lead me there!"

They almost ran down the driveway to the parking court, Gregory setting the breakneck pace.

"Good grief!" protested his lady. "What's the rush? I'm not *this* thirsty!"

"Sorry," he apologized, slowing down a trifle. "We haven't much farther to go, anyway. See that little roadster, over there?"

"Um-hum. It's Gloria's roadster, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Are we going to count stars in Gloria's roadster—with the top up?"

"We are," said Gregory grimly.

He opened the roadster's door for Marion, slid in after her and banged it shut. He found the flask, brought along by Tuck as a sort of auxiliary tank, and proffered it to Marion, who partook with gusto. He himself drank hurriedly. There was no time to lose.

"Now!" he said when the flask was put away. "I feel better, don't you?" He possessed himself gently of Marion's hands. "You have lovely hands," he told her. "I noticed them this afternoon. You would have, of course. Everything about you is—rather remarkable. Dangerously so, I should say."

He lifted one of the hands, kissed each finger-tip, kissed the palm and pressed it against his face. As he did so, something small and cold and tired in his mind smiled faintly. Women were such fools. All but one.

He drew Marion's hand around gently until her arm encircled his neck. He put his own near arm about her shoulders and tilted up her chin with his free hand.

"You know, I sort of like you," he said.

"Do you, Greg?"

He nodded, eyes on her eyes in the darkness.

"Well," she sighed, "I'm glad, because I'm crazy about you."

He kissed her. It had taken even less time than he had anticipated.

He continued to kiss her, to hold her tight, to

breathe sentimental spurious things—meanwhile listening, listening hard. For what seemed an hour at least—it must have been about five minutes—he heard nothing. Nothing but the wail of the distant band, the rustle of the palm-trees in the wind, and his own murmurings . . . His back was toward the club-house. With increasing difficulty he restrained himself from turning around to peer up the drive.

He never did hear the footsteps for which his ears had strained. But they came. After a time Marion, lifting her head from his shoulder, stiffened, and her gaze plunged into the darkness close behind him.

"Hello!" she said in surprise. "Gloria?"

"Yes," answered Gloria's voice, cool and even. "I'm —sorry I interrupted."

Gregory looked around. She had begun already to retrace her steps.

Marion called after her, "Come back here, honey! You're not interrupting. Do you want something? Your car?"

Gloria halted; faced them. She was several yards away now, a little ivory statue in the gloaming.

"No," she said. "No. I don't want—anything at all."

She turned again, and fled on up the drive, until she was one with the farthest lavender shadows.

"Why," said Marion, "how—how queer!"

"Wasn't it!" said Gregory, white-lipped.

He returned with a jolt to the immediate present; to the church, to the ceremony. Guiltily he glanced to

right and left, at once aware that something was wrong. This awful lull! Prolonged, uncomfortable. Nobody was speaking, nobody was stirring at all—and everyone was eying him. The bishop was eying him. The bridesmaids were eying him. Tuck was eying him with agonized eyes . . . For one hideous second he fancied he had spoken aloud of the things he was thinking. Then he saw Tuck's lips say "Ring!" soundlessly, and he realized what the trouble was. The realization was an infinite relief.

From the vest pocket just below his heart he produced Gloria's little ring and gave it to Tuck.

He did not look at her. He could not.

"With this ring—" boomed the voice of the bishop.

"With this ring—" echoed Tuck, low.

Gregory looked straight at the red-headed bridesmaid, because she was across from him.

She met his eyes, and smiled faintly; an intimate smile that remembered last night and asked him if he too remembered.

"Fool," he thought. But she was pretty. Symmetrical and slim, with a crimson mouth. Oh, well . . .

He smiled faintly back.

21600

"THE MOTHER HAS THE CUSTODY—"

"THE MOTHER HAS THE CUSTODY—"

MARGERY BARTLETT sat deep in a chair with her high-heeled feet in another chair and her slim young legs in tan net stockings making a bridge between. On the arms of the chair her elbows were propped, lifting her shoulders a little; her brown head rested decoratively against the crimson back. Before her eyes, her hands held a tilted magazine, big and glossy. She was not reading. The thumb of her right hand released the pages listlessly, one by one, and the thumb of the left hand waited for them and caught them.

"Mother," she called.

There was no answer and presently, lowering the magazine and turning her head very slightly, she called again, "Mother?"

"There in a minute, dear."

Margery glanced at the tiny oblong watch on her left wrist that looked like a graduation gift—and had been one. "It's quarter of," she added warningly.

"I know. I'm hurrying."

Margery raised the magazine again, this time raised it all the way and tilted it so that it lay like a flattened tent above her chest. She allowed the sharp top of its binding to dig the soft point of her chin, and stared

over it at her shoe buckles, thoughtfully. She was about eighteen, with unafraid direct brown eyes and the tiny dart of a widow's peak on her forehead. She had a straight short nose, a rather wide mouth frankly painted—not, you felt, to be alluring, but merely to be modern, to be gay.

Modern she was in all things: from the top of the head that her barber shingled weekly with a dry razor, to the tips of the fingers that wore little white-rimmed shields of pale mauve polish—that drummed impatiently, restlessly, now, on the varnished magazine cover. People who called her pretty damned her with faint praise, yet no one could have called her beautiful. Her adjectives were the *magnum cum laudes* of her generation: such adjectives as "good looking" and "smart"; such phrases as "the most attractive thing" . . .

From the room about her your eyes unerringly picked out her possessions, her casual contributions to the scheme. That beribboned ukelele on the long piano bench. That piece of sheet music open on the piano. That copy of a Dartmouth year book, 1928 edition. The black fox fur thrown into the seat of a chair beside the door, together with a pocketbook, a gold patent lighter, a latchkey, a monstrous black straw hat with drooping sides. It was even possible to guess that the roses in the vase on the piano were hers; they seemed to breathe some young man's adoration.

Everything else in the room belonged to Margery's mother, Mrs. Austin Bartlett. Mrs. *Louise* Bartlett:

she had been divorced twelve years. Mrs. Bartlett entered now, hurriedly, in a little gust of the sort of sachet that is sewed up in squares of blue satin and sold at benefit bazaars.

"What's the matter?" she queried at once.

Her daughter looked up quickly. "Nothing. Why?"

"You were scowling."

"Was I?" Margery's lashes curved down again. "Just thinking, I guess," she said.

Mrs. Bartlett, standing near, working a glove over chubby knuckles, sighed sympathetically, her gaze on her daughter. She was a short, plump, anxious woman whose eyebrows had never been plucked, whose heels had never been stilted higher than a commonsense inch above the ground. She wore a navy blue Georgette crepe dress with a pleated ruffle attached to the blouse and a number of lingerie shoulder straps showing through. There was a streak of talcum on her neck, a loop of hairnet etching her left temple. The gloves she was donning were washable gloves, and they were somewhat stiff. In your mind's eye you saw them, fastened together, swinging in an open sunny window.

Mrs. Bartlett sighed. "Poor darling," she said. "I'm so sorry you have to go through this."

"This" was the imminent visit of Margery's father to Margery: an event that took place once every three months, for four hours.

"I know how hard it is for you," said Mrs. Bartlett complacently.

Margery's brown eyes, ever so slightly narrowing,

scrutinized her mother's face for an instant. Then they strayed past her to the patch of window that showed between the crimson brocade hangings.

"I don't mind," she murmured.

"We-ell—of course, you're awfully sweet about it, always—" Mrs. Bartlett's tone said plainly, "But you do mind. Of course you mind. You *must*."

This was a thing upon which she insisted, subtly but unremittingly. Margery dreaded her father's coming. Mrs. Bartlett would have it no other way. Any contrary evidence she promptly dismissed as a commendable but perfectly transparent attempt on the part of her child to make the best of a bad business. . . .

"It isn't very often, anyway," Mrs. Bartlett added consolingly. "Only four times a year. And he doesn't stay long."

Margery said nothing.

"Button this for me," begged her mother.

She held one gloved hand, palm up, toward Margery for the glove to be clasped at the wrist. Leisurely then she began on the second glove.

Margery watched her. "You'll run into him going out, if you don't hurry," she observed. "He always comes exactly on the dot."

"What time is it now?"

"It's six minutes of."

"Plenty of time," said Mrs. Bartlett.

She was, Margery knew, reluctant to go until she had to. She always lingered when Austin Bartlett was coming. This was not in the least because she desired

a glimpse of him; it was because she wanted to leave something with Margery—some reminding comment, some haunting remark that would be a ghost of herself, on guard in her absence. The right words, however, were difficult to find. They were always difficult to find.

Mrs. Bartlett became plaintive. "I believe you're in a hurry to get rid of me!" she said.

"Don't be silly, Mother."

"But I do! If you've told me once in the past half hour what time it is, you've told me a dozen times!"

Margery's eyes had shifted. "I know how you hate to see him," she said, "that's all."

"And *why shouldn't* I?"

Mrs. Bartlett's tone was triumphant; these were the words she had sought. In them, all her grievances, all Austin Bartlett's misdeeds and defections and shortcomings, were briefly but effectively summed up. Margery would remember where her loyalty belonged. Mrs. Bartlett, snug, could go along now.

She smiled sweetly. "Of course I was teasing, dear," she said. "I know you're not in a hurry to get rid of me for anyone's sake but my own—and it *is* time I went, isn't it?" She held out the second glove. "Just button this for Mother."

Margery buttoned it, then tilted up her face to receive the quick dry print of her mother's lips.

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by, dear. I'll be back about six or six-thirty."

"All right."

"What time is your dinner engagement?"

"Seven-thirty," Margery said. "But—maybe I'll break it."

"Who's it with?"

"Bill Kennedy."

"Well," said Mrs. Bartlett, "tell Lena, if you're going to be here."

"I will."

"Good-by, dear."

("Oh, *please* GO!" thought Margery.)

"Good-by," she said. "I hope you'll enjoy the concert."

Mrs. Bartlett looked to see whether she had her tickets. She felt about in her handbag to make sure her glasses were there. Departing, she stopped to straighten a picture, and again to dig her heel into the edge of a little rug and pull it toward her. She left by way of the kitchen in order to tell Lena that Miss Margery might tell her she might be home to dinner. . . .

Margery sat for a moment longer quite still, in the deep crimson chair. Her hands were motionless, spread on the magazine in her lap, dimly feeling its cool. Even her eyes were motionless, fixed ahead. The frown that her mother had noticed before had returned to pull her straight dark brows together, and in the fullness of her lower lip her teeth were set. You could not know what she was thinking; Mrs. Bartlett often complained that you never knew what Margery was thinking. But after a time an abrupt little exclamation

seemed to proclaim that the thoughts, whatever they were, had become insupportable.

The magazine spanked the floor. Margery took her feet down and rose, and circulated about the room, plucking up the lids of various metal boxes with her forefinger, seeking a cigarette. She found one, together with matches in a little cardboard folder marked "Club Deauville, 49th Street, West of B'way."

She lit the cigarette, waved the tiny match to extinguish it, bent it in her fingers and dropped it into a tray. She inhaled deeply, once. "By the time I've smoked this," she thought, "he'll be here."

She did not sit down again. She could not be still. Her mood compelled her to keep moving, to stay upright—to be ready. Her course was aimless. By a table she halted and picked up a book and eyed the illustrated jacket without seeing it. At the piano she paused again and examined her roses absently. Before the windows she stood for some time with her feet planted wide, as a little boy stands: her hands on her hips, her cigarette sending a thin double corkscrew of smoke backward into the room.

It was while she stood so that the doorbell rang. She whirled as if the sound were a tangible thing, a sharp and sudden needle that had pricked her. So instant was the obedience of her muscles to the summons that she thought she must have started before she heard it—intuitively, with the lift of her father's arm toward the bell. She ran through the rooms as she had used to run when she was small, her swift feet

clattering loud on the hardwood strips between the rugs, the loose silk handkerchief collar of her frock a-flutter like the erstwhile sailor collar. "Never mind, Lena—I'm answering——"

She reached the door without any diminution of speed, brought up sharply against it; wrenched at the knob. (Hours later she would wonder why her right wrist hurt a little.)

Her father was standing there, smiling. Quick as a rubber stamp hitting a paper, the sight of him marked Margery's mind: the height and the breadth of him; the slick dark hair and the sun-bronzed face; the intent, alight gray eyes, so glad to see her.

Then her own eyes were hidden on his shoulder, her lips were quivering against the cloth of his coat, pressing hard and harder against it, to steady themselves. Her arms were around him, and between his shoulder blades her hands were fierce tight fists, gripping folds of the coat, lest he go away. But that was absurd. He wouldn't go. His arms held her close, his cheek was against her hair. Silently for the fraction of a minute they clung together, clung hard and swayed very slightly, as if with the impact of their meeting.

"My dear," murmured Austin Bartlett. "My dear——"

She felt him take a quick short breath. Then he commanded gayly, "Let me look at you!" and tried to put her from him so he could. But Margery's locked arms tightened. Not until her mouth was firm, till the ache in her throat had subsided at least a little, would

she face him. In this as in many things she was like a boy, ashamed of emotion. It was one of the reasons why her father had almost always treated her as if she were a boy, a beloved son.

He understood now. He always understood. He held her, and waited, touching his lips to her hair. Presently Margery stirred and drew away of her own accord, letting her hands slide over his shoulders and down. Her eyes were very bright, but they were dry. She smiled at her father; clutched the lapels of his coat and shook him a little. He did not shake easily. "Great big you," said Margery softly. And she said, "I am glad to see you, Barty."

"And I to see you."

They surveyed each other happily. "You're all sunburned," Margery observed. "Your nose is peeling."

She touched it with her forefinger, then laid the finger along its ridge. Always she had liked to do this. It was such a straight nose, so beautiful. . . . Her father said, "Pff!" to blow her hand away, as he always did. Then they both laughed.

"Come on in!" cried Margery, seizing his arm.

The slam of the door behind them was pleasant, shutting out everything else in the world. It released a sudden avalanche of sentences and questions. In the foyer Austin Bartlett laid down his hat and stick and gloves, and Margery hovered about him, chattering, asking and interrupting.

"When did you get in?"

"Just a little wh——"

"Where're you staying? Ambassador?"

"I'm not staying, unfortunately," her father said. "I'm going right back again, on the Wolverine tonight."

It was saddening. Sometimes he remained for a day or two, and he and Margery had gay clandestine "dates" together. "Oh, *why?*" she pleaded now. "Do you have to? What for?"

But when he answered, telling her something about a directors' meeting, she hardly heard him. Her eyes, set on his face, were preoccupied with another thought. She expressed it when he had finished. "All the way from Chicago, just for the afternoon!——"

"The afternoon with my infant," Austin Bartlett said, "whom I haven't seen since April. You mustn't leave that out." He took her hands and squeezed them. "You see," he said, carefully lightly, "I'm—I rather like the little cuss."

Margery nodded soberly. "I guess you do, at that."

Then they could laugh again.

("Anyway," Margery thought, "he won't go. He'll stay. Directors' meeting or no directors' meeting——")

They entered the living room. "Sit there," said Margery, indicating a divan. She herself gathered cigarettes and matches and an ashtray, and dragged up a small low table to put them on. On the divan beside her father she settled down, sideways so that she faced him, one leg folded under her, one shoulder against the back. She lighted two cigarettes at once and gave him one. "Now!" she breathed. "Talk to me."

The living room was brighter than the foyer had been; Austin Bartlett's eyes were a lighter, more luminous gray, and the dark hair over his ears was tipped with silver. To Margery it was as though all the brightness of the room was gathered and thrown, spotlight fashion, around him, extinguishing everything he did not touch. Her eyes adored him. His profile, so straight and strong. The dim glow of red through the tan of his skin. The tiny lines at the corners of his eyes, shaped like the sticks of a fan. He was very handsome; huge, magnificent, as a great athlete grown a little old.

Margery snuggled closer. Her father's hand reached over and covered her hand, holding it in her lap. His glance which had made a brief thoughtful tour of the room returned to her. It was still thoughtful. "Your mother—is well, is she?" he inquired.

"Very well—" Margery almost said, "thank you," but checked herself. "Very well indeed," she said instead.

"Headaches not bothering any more?"

"Not so much."

"I'm glad," Austin Bartlett said.

Then his eyes seemed to put away all thought of anyone but Margery. Affectionately they considered her, while his lips smiled. "And you," he said. "There's no need to ask how you are."

"No," agreed Margery. "I'm fine."

She had said it too swiftly, she knew; and almost defiantly. With her lashes lowered she wondered if

he had noticed. Panic gripped her for an instant. "Oh," she thought, "not *yet*——"

To lift the lashes and see his expression required a certain courage. But it was all right. He had noticed nothing.

She began to talk fast and vivaciously, to make a verbal flight, pell-mell, from danger. "Oh, listen, I must tell you about Commencement! You got my letter, didn't you? I did so wish you could have been there—you'd have appreciated it so, Barty——"

The description took several minutes. A graphic and humorous description of time-honored ceremonies, by a young iconoclast who characterized them inelegantly as "perfect hooey." There had been, for one thing, an ivy-planting ceremony, and Margery as president of the graduating class had made a speech. Standing before her father she rehearsed it oratorically, with gestures. " 'May our loyalty grow with this little vine, enduring through the years'——

"Ach!" she exclaimed as one in acute physical distress. "Sickening!"

She plumped herself down on the divan again and reached for a fresh cigarette. "But they made me do it."

"And," said her father, amused, "you doubtless did it extremely well."

"Of course I did!" Margery said. "There wasn't a dry eye when I finished. Actually!"

Her look was eloquent. Austin Bartlett gave a shout of delight. In the little pause that followed he con-

tinued to smile broadly, tilting his head back, blowing smoke toward the ceiling.

Presently he sobered. "Well," he said. "And now what?"

"You know what," Margery reminded him.

"You want to study for the stage."

"Yes."

"I thought perhaps you might have changed your mind," her father said.

Margery's eyes were reproachful. "You knew I wouldn't, Barty," she said. "I never will. It's what I want to do—more than anything. It's the only thing I really want to do."

Austin Bartlett nodded comprehendingly. He smoked in silence for a minute. Beside him Margery also was silent, meditatively picking loose particles of tobacco from the end of her cigarette.

"How does your mother feel about it?" her father asked at last.

Margery smiled slightly. "Hot and bothered."

"Opposes it, eh?"

"Well—not exactly. But she isn't much for it. She talks about the Dangers and Temptations—*you* know," Margery said. "As Mother would."

There was no criticism in her tone. She merely stated.

"I see," Austin Bartlett said.

"'Stage-struck,'" quoted Margery speculatively. "That's what Mother calls it. Calls me, rather. I suppose I am, in a way, but—it's deeper than that. I mean

—I don't just want to go on the stage because men like actresses, or because it looks like a lot of fun and I might meet Alfred Lunt——"

Margery broke off and appealed to her father with her eyes. "You see what I mean?"

"Perfectly," he said.

"It's in here." She tapped her chest. "It *isn't* 'stage-struck.' It's a sort of burning ambition to—to amount to something, in the only way *I know* I can.

"I started to say," supplemented Margery, " 'to express myself.' But that sounds so silly."

"No, it doesn't," said her father. "It's what you mean. I understand."

He always understood. He understood anything, everything. Margery felt drawn closer to him, she moved physically even closer in obedience to that feeling; and all through the discussion that followed she sat so, her arm linked through her father's arm, her shoulder against his. And she thought, with a new peace that anesthetized dread, "I can tell him now. Any time now."

As they talked, small things her eyes rested on photographed themselves on her mind with an intense, queer clarity; she would remember always these small things. The cubes of sunlight on the rug, how they were shaped. The lift and fall of the glass-curtains with the breathing of the wind. The two pale petals that had fallen from a rose to lie like shells on dark mahogany. Even the cravat her father wore, and the curve of his watch chain from pocket to pocket, and

the way the sharp crease in his trousers leg vanished over the bend of the knee, to begin again a little further down. . . .

With her fingertip Margery traced an invisible line where the crease was lost. Her eyes watched her finger absorbedly.

"There's one thing—" she said. And halted.

The three words followed the pause at the conclusion of their planning. After she had uttered them, there was another pause. Austin Bartlett waited. He had turned his head, and Margery could feel his eyes, kind, fond eyes, questioning her.

"Yes?" he said encouragingly, after a moment.

Margery's fingertips still traced the line, came back, traced it over again. "There's something I want to tell you," she said, "but—it's hard——"

She stopped again. In the little silence her father's arm went around her shoulders and held her, and she put her head on his breast, her cheek against his coat lapel. She shut her eyes. "Hold me *tight,* Barty. And—don't let go, will you?"

"I won't, my dear."

"No matter what it is?"

"No matter what it is."

"I couldn't bear that," said Margery, low.

Her eyelids opened, and her eyes fixed upon an orange silk sofa cushion beyond her father. She did not lift her head, but kept it still, resting against him. "It's—this sex business."

"Yes," said her father calmly, at once.

"Barty——"

"Yes, dear?"

"I—in May, I was an awful damn fool——"

Austin Bartlett's hand that was stroking the bent brown head, gently, with measured strokes, faltered only an instant. Then it went on.

"Remember I wrote you about going home with Bee Bailey over a weekend?"

"Yes."

"Then," Margery said. "And——"

She drew in her breath. "And it seems I'm—I didn't get away with it," she said.

Her father made a sound in his throat, a hoarse and wordless cry in which there was protest, incredulity—pity. His arm around Margery tightened like a thick rope pulled taut; his hand that had smoothed her hair lay arrested on it, the fingers spread. When he spoke, his voice was husky but very gentle; he asked two questions. "Yes," answered Margery. And she answered, "Positive."

Then for a little interval the room was very still. Neither of them spoke nor stirred at all.

"Someone you met there?" Austin Bartlett asked quietly at last. "Or——"

Margery's head moved in quick negation. "No. I'd known him before. I've known him a long time."

"You're—you care a great deal about him?"

Margery hesitated only an instant. "No," she said then. "I don't. I don't care a damn about him.

"There wasn't any excuse," she said wearily.

She raised her head and sat upright, and her father's hand slid down to rest on her arm. They did not look at each other. One of Margery's cheeks was pink from its contact with rough cloth; the other was very pale. She stared straight before her with eyes that held unhappiness and an honest perplexity. "I can't explain it," the tired small voice went on. "I guess I got sort of drunk—on a lot of things beside liquor. I mean—there was a moon, and surf, and music away off, and a search-light like—like a great big windshield-wiper——"

She made a vague little baffled gesture with both hands. "It all just sort of *got* me, that's all."

"I—think I see," her father said slowly.

After a moment he said. "How old is this man?"

"Not very. Twenty or twenty-one. You mustn't try to blame him," Margery said. "After all—it was up to me."

She could talk now without reluctance, without the definite effort of will that had been required before for the making of every smallest statement. She could think aloud, and free her mind. "I suppose," she said curiously, "people would say I was 'bad,' now. Wouldn't they?"

"Some people would, undoubtedly."

"Mother would."

Austin Bartlett said nothing.

"It seems so funny." Margery was still thinking aloud, her tone quizzical. "I don't *feel* 'bad.' I just feel —stupid. I mean, I know I was a perfect sap, and I'm ashamed of that, and sorry— But this idea that I'm a

'fallen woman'—" Her lips curved in the semblance of a smile. "I just don't seem to believe in it," she said.

"Nor should you," said her father emphatically.

Margery glanced up. "You don't, do you?"

"Certainly *not.*" Bartlett sat upright; leaned toward her. "See here, my dear—let's get this straight: you've made a big mistake, a serious one—I'm not condoning it, nor minimizing its gravity at all—but it *was* a mistake, and essentially you're as 'good' and as fine as you ever were. And anyone who says you're not—doesn't know you."

He took her hand and folded it firmly between both of his. "So remember that, will you?" he said. "And—keep the chin up."

"It's up," said Margery.

But she was nearer tears in this moment than she had been at any time. "I *knew* you'd be like this about it," she almost wailed. "So—marvelous to me——"

She shook her head to try to rid her eyes of the threatening moisture. "It hurts," she said, "so much worse than as if you'd been angry. I knew it would. I knew just how it would be. You'll never know how I hated to tell you, but—I had to, Barty. I couldn't tell Mother——"

She let the sentence hang there, incomplete, yet utterly complete. Her father gave a barely preceptible nod, that was like the period on the end.

"In the first place," Margery said, "she and I have never talked about—'the Facts of Life'—" She grimaced over the phrase "—at all. Not even generally. We

just never could. I tried once or twice when I was a kid, but it always embarrassed her so terribly— I felt sorry for her," Margery concluded. "So I stopped."

"You might have come to me," her father said.

"I know. I should've."

They were silent a moment, both remembering that in those days they had not been as close as they were now. In those days Margery had been too young not to be influenced, too young not to believe what she was told.

"It seems funny now," she said aloud, "that I didn't——"

Her voice trailed off. The problem uppermost in their minds put an end to the brief digression. They were silent again; then Margery stated simply, "Mother would *die.*"

"She would take it very hard, certainly," her father said.

They thought about it.

"She'd say I had to marry him," Margery said. "I know that much."

"And you don't want to marry him?"

"It's the last thing in the world I want to do."

Austin Bartlett's gray gaze lifted and fixed itself on a tapestry on the opposite wall. "The young man—" he said. "What does he think about it?"

"I haven't told him."

"Haven't——?"

"No. I thought," said Margery, "I'd rather wait and talk to you, first. I haven't told him anything.

"As a matter of fact," she added, "I haven't seen him since that night. Since the next morning, rather.

"I never see him," she said dispassionately. "That's what makes it all—ridiculous."

"Where does he live?"

"Pelham."

Austin Bartlett made no comment.

"We never did see much of each other," Margery explained. "It wasn't like that, at all. I mean—if we met, all right, or if we didn't, all right. That sort of friendship."

"I see," said her father.

"He'd marry me," Margery said, "of course. If I told him the way it is, he'd get all honorable— He'd even pretend he wanted to marry me." She made a little sound like a laugh without mirth. "Poor Don," she said, "he's *got* a girl! Someone in New Haven he's been mad about for two years. And besides that he wants to finish college and study law. He'd rather be *shot* than marry me! Just as I'd rather be shot than marry him."

"I—see," said her father.

He stared at the tapestry.

"Of course," he said deliberately, after a pause, "marriage is—the usual solution——"

Margery cut in at once. "I know. Usual, accepted—but don't you see what a *hellish* one it would be for us, under the circumstances—" She caught her breath sharply; shook her head. "We'd be so miserable, Barty," she said. "Don't you *see?* I'd hate him so, for

spoiling all my life—that was going to be so beautiful and—so different. And he'd hate me for spoiling his."

Austin Bartlett listened. Waited.

"Of course," Margery went on, "Mother would say we deserved to be miserable. That that was our punishment. But the fact remains that we wouldn't marry, or *think* of marrying—if I weren't this way. So the punishment would be for the *outcome*—wouldn't it?—not for the wrong itself. And there's no sense in that, that I can see."

"No," her father said.

"You understand," said Margery with sudden frankness, "what I'm driving at."

Bartlett nodded. Almost his lips smiled, though his eyes were grave. "Quite," he said drily.

"There's another solution."

"Yes."

"I'm—crawling," Margery said. "I admit it. I can't be big about this, it costs too much. It's *too much* punishment. Oh, maybe not more than I deserve—I don't know anything about that—but more than I can *take*, when I don't love him. It's like—like breaking my neck because I stubbed my toe."

Quite simply she put her head down on her father's shoulder again. "I can't, Barty," she said. "I *can't*. Some day I want to marry somebody I love, and—have a baby. But not now. And—not him."

She was motionless an instant. Then her free hand stole up to her father's face and the tips of her fingers touched his lips, as if like a deaf-mute's fingers they

would feel, and so hear, the words to come. "Have I *got* to, Barty?" she said.

He held her close, secure. For a while it was very still in the room, and the world beyond the windows was very loud. Austin Bartlett's hand began again mechanically to smooth the clipped hair, with gentle strokes. He spoke at last.

"No," he said. "No. I—think not."

At dinner Margery said to her mother, "I forgot to tell you. Peggy Jameson called up from Narragansett this afternoon just after you left and asked me to come down tomorrow morning and stay with her for —a week or so."

"Peggy Jameson?"

"You remember. She was in my class."

"Oh yes. Of course. Well," Mrs. Bartlett said, "are you going?"

"I told her I would, yes."

"Narragansett. That'll be lovely, won't it?"

Margery watched a smoke ring float away across the table. "Lovely," she said.

"For a week, did you say?"

"Maybe a little longer," Margery amended evenly. "Or maybe only a few days. I don't know yet—just how long I will stay."

"Poor child," said her mother suddenly, "you're tired, aren't you?"

"A little."

"You look tired."

Margery stirred her coffee.

"Pale," said her mother. "It was a strain, wasn't it? The afternoon."

"I was tired anyway."

"It always is a strain," Mrs. Bartlett went on, unheeding. "I should think he'd *know*——"

She checked herself. Bit a little cake in two, and chewed it. "He went right back, did he?" she said.

Margery nodded. "On the Wolverine tonight."

It was a lie. Another lie.

Inquisitively then, with puzzled eyes exploring her daughter's face, Mrs. Bartlett asked the question she always asked. "What under the sun do you and he find to *say* to each other for four whole hours? What do you *talk* about?"

Margery gazed into her cup. With her spoon she sought to capture, intact, a floating island of tiny bubbles.

"Oh—" she said. "I don't know. Nothing."

FUMBLE

FUMBLE

THE lamps were not lit in the room; but light from the street, falling through the double casement windows, cascading over the cushioned window seat to a wide white pool on the floor, illumined it faintly. You could tell that it was a college room, a careless and a gay room. There were Morris chairs. There were smoking stands. There were photographs of girls. There was a fireplace; a hearth littered with cigarette stubs; a mantel bearing pictures, magazines, piled sheet music, a silver trophy cup, an empty pinch bottle, an alarm clock and a stolen "Ladies Only" sign. A victrola and a tower of records stood on a desk, shoved in among papers and books. A saxophone curled in a chair, catching gleams of the light. Banners patched the pale walls.

On the couch in the corner a large young man lay. Face downward. Motionless.

The room was ahum with cacophonous noises, borrowed, like the light, from outside. The snarling of horns of automobiles, the grinding of brakes, the shrill thin scream of a traffic policeman's whistle. That day, in the concrete horseshoe that loomed at the edge of the town, a game had been played; and eighty-five thousand people had watched it. They were trying to go home

now. "Let us *out!*" snarled their horns. "Out of this town! We're cold! We're tired! Let us *o-o-o-u-u-ut!*"

Voices sang in the street, male voices, hilarious voices. Whole carloads went by, singing and shouting. Carloads of the conquerers. Triumphant. Pitiless. Howling defiance to the campus of the conquered. "Team! *Team!* TEAM!" Bawling the score. "Nine to seven! Yaaaay! Nine to seven!"

The young man on the couch stirred slightly. His hands, flung up over his head, opened and shut.

A tea dance was going on in the Beta house next door. The throb of the jazz came, muffled by walls, like a beaten jungle drum, miles away. Nearer were the sounds of sociability downstairs. The fellows and their girls, grads and their wives, warming themselves before the fire in the living room, sipping drinks, eating sandwiches. Discussing the game. The young man above heard only their voices; but he knew. He knew what they said. It was the thing they were saying tonight all over the campus, all over the town. It was the thing that, in the basement of the telegraph office on High Street, the newspaper men from the cities were saying, rattling it out on their portable typewriters, handing it page by yellow page to the telegraph operators, so that, tomorrow morning, headlines wide and black might cry it to the world at large. "Evans' Fumble Loses for the Scarlet in Final Minutes of Gridiron Classic." . . .

He stirred, and dug his face deeper in the damp warm curve of the pillows. He was back at the field.

The dusk of two hours earlier was graying all around him, the ceaseless raucous roar of just two hours ago was crashing on his heedless ears. The game was almost over. It was almost their game, seven to three. All they had to do was hold 'em, *hold 'em*. . . . Seated on a bench in a scarlet blanket, hunched like a crippled thing, he was holding 'em, from the sidelines. His cleated shoes were clawing the sod beneath him, his fists were flying wildly, pounding his knees; his breath was short. Every muscle of him, every sinew and nerve, was fighting with the team. . . . Now he was darting out onto the field, carrying his right arm high, feeling on his jerseyed back the sting of the coach's hand. His heart bursting, bursting. Now he was there. He was saying two quick choked words to the referee, and Andrews was pulling off his headguard. Andrews, mud-streaked, bloody, going to the bench—so that Jeffry Evans, substitute, might win his letter before it was forever too late.

You had to play in this game, or the Army game, to win a letter. Lesser games didn't count.

Jeffry Evans was a senior, and in three aching years he had played only in the games that didn't count. Or none at all.

He thought now, lying in the darkness, about the letter; returned mentally from the field to think about it. They would give it to him, he supposed, anyway. But what a mockery! He would not wear it. Here he had yearned for it, dreamed of it, toiled grimly and almost thanklessly all these autumns for it—and now

that it was his he could take no pride in it, but only shame, remembering at what loss it had been won.

He drew himself wearily upright and sat on the edge of the couch, his body bent forward, elbows on knees, his fingers grooving his mussed dark hair. A band was approaching in the street below, coming closer, growing louder. It was a big band and a young band, gone insane, raving in delirium. He caught the tune it was playing—but only because he knew so well what tune it would be playing, that enemy band. *"Yard by yard we'll fight our way, Through the scar-let line."* It was very close now. He could almost hear the marching feet, he could see with the eyes of his imagination the sweatered, white-capped youths who played, the raccoon-coated dervishes who thronged in their wake, dancing a saraband. He could see the goal posts. They had torn them down, were bearing their splintered gray remains on a hundred proud fur shoulders through the town. The goal posts. . . .

Three minutes more. They were huddled for signals again. Bending very low, heads together, quick breaths mingling white in the tight little circle they made. LeMarr coughing and spitting. Capron dashing the sweat from his eyes. Himself pulling at a dislocated thumb with his other hand. The thirty-five yard line. First down. "Formation left! *Evans!* Off tackle."

He had leaped into place, he had received the ball, he had carried it—how far? A couple of yards maybe, three, four. Then he had fallen, struggling, sobbing for breath, under three men. *And the ball*——

"God!" he groaned aloud, and dropped his head to the arms that were crossed on his knees, rolling it from side to side in the frenzy of recollection.

He thought that he might have guessed this thing would happen to him; might have foreseen that in the crisis he would fail. He always failed. Not pettily and inconspicuously, at the very start; but terribly, later, when it mattered. Viewing in bitter retrospect his twenty-two years, he saw that they were spotted with the near-successes that hurt far worse than no success at all. There was that tennis championship, lost in the third protracted set of the finals. There was that scholarship prize, for which he had lacked one point. Incidents like those, by the score. He was always just missing. Climbing just high enough so that the heights were visible—and so that the fall was terrific. As now. How much, how infinitely better, never to have made the football squad, than to have made it and toiled on and on—to this!

"Fumble." Butter-fingered word. Thick and slow and stupid word. It had branded him at last, stamped itself upon him. Now all men should know him for the sorry thing he was, the *almost* good, the *near*-do-well.

His mind was momentarily diverted from himself by a sudden commotion at the door. Some one trying to get in. He sat upright and dully, through the gloom, regarded the writhing knob. He had forgotten that the door was locked.

"Hey, Jeff! Lemme in, will you, Jeff? It's Weary."

The identification was necessary. Jeffry's roommate,

"Weary" Haynes—so called because of his habit of napping in classes, in chapel, and elsewhere where the world was rather dull—had led cheers from two until half past five that afternoon. His voice was now not a voice, but a guttural wheeze, quite unrecognizable.

Jeffry rose from the couch. He had an impulse to tell Weary to go away for *cripes* sake, to go away and stay away and let him alone. This impulse he defeated. It was babyish. He drew a quick sleeve across his eyes, humiliated at the gesture even though there was none but himself to witness it; and went to the door.

As he turned the key with his right hand, his left sought and found the electric switch on the wall beside the door. Light poured upon him, revealing him as big, most broad of chest and shoulder, slim of waist. He had the V-shaped torso of the born athlete, mounted on long straight legs. His hair was black and slightly wavy, his blue eyes were direct, his chin was emphatic, he was nice.

"Hullo," he said.

"Hullo," said Weary. "Why the bolts and bars?"

"No special reason. I—just thought I'd lock it."

This was lame, and Weary's eyes upon him were wise and rather uncomfortably sympathetic. "I thought I'd better lock it," he explained additionally. "I didn't want any of those dolls from downstairs coming crashing in, thinking it was the—— Say, what's happened to your tooth?"

"I broke it," said Weary. Which was obvious. He bared his gums in a solemn grimace, that Jeffry might

the better see. "Chipped the corner right off. Hit it with the mouth of the megaphone in the excitement. Damnedest thing! It went in my mouth, and when I started the cheer, I blew it out. 'Ev'rybody up!' I yelled, and on the 'Ev'—*wst!*—out she flew, at sixty miles an hour, and gone forever."

"Too bad."

"Oh, s'all right," said Weary. "It'll fix." He had shut the door and crossed the room, and now he dropped into a chair. "I regret that I have but one tooth to give to my college," he paraphrased, and leaned back, stretching his legs. "Hey! Hey! I'm done up."

"I'll bet. It sounded great, though," said Jeffry, who had not really heard a single rah.

"Fair," Weary nodded, "fair."

He meditated a minute, frowning slightly; then dug beneath his sweater into a pocket of his white flannels and produced a sat-upon packet of cigarettes. "Smoke, Jeff?"

"Yeah, I will."

"I should think," observed Weary, watching him light up, "that the first butt after three months of training would be in the nature of an event."

"It is," said Jeffry, inhaling.

"Almost an epoch, in fact."

Constraint between them, born of the things that had not been said, but must be said, was increasing; their remarks had a forced and hollow ring. Their eyes strayed and shifted. Weary was visibly seeking the

appropriate words, the fit opening. Jeffry's state of mind was somewhat that of one recently bereaved, meeting for the first time since his bereavement an intimate friend. "Well, say it," he thought drearily. "Go ahead. Let's get it over with."

He stole a glance at his roommate, and felt an abrupt, new pang. Here was a man who was all the things that he himself was not. Here was a man who *never* fumbled. Everything Weary did, he did triumphantly well, easily and beautifully well. What he wanted, he got. A political office, a B in a course, a trip to Europe, a girl—whatever it was, it was Weary's from the moment he thought of it first. He was that kind. Chairman of the prom committee, business manager of the *Bleat,* head cheer-leader, winner of the campus popularity prize by an overwhelming majority—his progress through the University had been strewn with laurels, attended with hysterical hosannahs. He was not athletic; but it came to Jeffry now that if he had been, if Weary had been the substitute put into today's game in the last five minutes, he would have made a touchdown, like the substitutes of fiction, and emerged trailing clouds of glory. "But," thought Jeffry, "he wouldn't have been a *substitute.*" . . .

Weary, into the silence, broadcast a small cough, a sort of preparatory "Stand by!" He tossed his cigarette to the hearth, where it lay among generations of its predecessors. And took out another.

"I think it's damn' fine, Jeff, getting your letter."

Jeffry was silent.

"If ever a guy deserved one," Weary continued warmly, "you deserve one. Every day for three years, all through the fall, sweating out there, working like a horse—Lord! I'll say you deserve it! They should've given it to you years ago."

"I wish they had," said Jeffry.

He did not see Weary's eyes, for his own eyes were lowered; but he felt them. There was a short pause. Then he rose, flung himself onto his feet with a sudden swift jerky movement, and walked to the window. He stood there, staring unseeing through the pane, his back to Weary, his knotted hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets. "If I'd copped it before," he said slowly, "they wouldn't have put me in the game today, and—we'd have won."

"Bilge!" exploded Weary promptly, loyally. "That's no way to look at it, Jeff."

"How else *can* I look at it?" Jeffry turned from the window, presenting a tragic face. "*I* threw the game away. I know it, and you know it." He turned back. "Everybody knows it," he added, low.

"Everybody *doesn't* know it!" Weary cried out, sitting erect in his earnestness. "In the first place, it isn't *so!* That is—well, a fumble—that might happen to anybody, mightn't it? Sure it might! Happens all the time! You didn't lose the game when you fumbled the ball any more than the rest of the team lost it when they didn't catch the fellow who picked it up, before he got to the goal-line!"

Weary cleared his throat hurriedly, risking no interruption. "And in the second place, Jeff, you haven't any idea how *anonymous* the players are in a football field. The crowd doesn't know who's who, half the time. They can't see the numbers very well, specially when it's dark like it was—and even if they can see, they don't look in their programs much to find out the names. They've *lost* their programs, by the fourth quarter. Besides, they don't *care!* They're not interested in individuals, they're interested in the *team!* Why, I'll bet you money that out of those eighty or ninety thousand people in the stadium this afternoon, only a few knew who it was who—fumbled. I'll *bet* you!"

"They'll know tomorrow," Jeffry said in the same low voice.

He seated himself on the window seat, still with his hands in his pockets, and eyed a cigarette burn in the worn green rug. "They'll know tomorrow, all right," he repeated. "Leave it to the sporting writers! They never head of Jeff Evans till this afternoon—but they found out. And so will everybody." He explored the burn with his heel, absently. "Anyway," he said, "what difference does it make whether everybody knows or doesn't? *I* know. I—knew beforehand."

"What?"

"I mean," explained Jeffry, patiently, quietly, "I might've. I ought to have known. It was just like me, what I did. I *would* do something like that. I'm one of those people."

"Oh, listen!" Weary was dismayed. "Don't talk like that, Jeff! Why, that's crazy! You're taking it too much to heart. Buck up, now, for God's sake, will you? It's over. Awful tough, but it couldn't be helped—so what the hell? *Forget* it!"

Jeffry smiled, not mirthfully; a twisted smile. He looked straight at Weary and, smiling, said, "Yes. You know how soon I'll forget it, don't you?"

And Weary was silenced.

He didn't forget it. Other people did, as other people do; but Jeffry forgot it never at all, nor did he comprehend that others had forgotten. By midyear there were undergraduates who, when the last sad game was mentioned, asked, "Who was it made that fumble? Rhinehart? Evans? One of the subs"—but this would have been inconceivable to him, even had he known of it. Because the thing that he had done was with him all the time, a damp dark cloud across his every sun, he fancied that the minds of all with whom he came in contact dwelt resentfully and perpetually upon it. He had always been a sensitive boy; now he was hypersensitive, almost quite truly mad with brooding and grieving. He went looking for wounds, and thought he found in the eyes of his fellows daggers of unforgiveness, and in their casual tongues, lashes of scorn.

The night of the football banquet, when they gave him his letter—with careful words anent his three-year service to the team—he suffered agonies. The applause,

which was generous, seemed merciless; hands slapping him on the raw—and so interminably! Sweat was chill on his face, his fingers nagged and worried his napkin. He could not look up. "Fellows," he said, "you—you all know whose fault——"

He couldn't go on.

They were very kind to him afterward, they shook his hand and mumbled things about not being an ass, and the captain said, "It's all right, Jeff, you know. Nobody's infallible. Why, the help you've been makes up for *that,* a dozen times over!" But he was not comforted. Pity—he felt it was nothing else—is never comforting to strong men.

He tried to wear the letter; not to wear it seemed absurd, when all the campus knew he had it. But wearing it meant minutes of screwing up his courage, meant agonies of sharp self-consciousness. Everybody eyed it. Freshmen, classmates, townspeople. That their eyes were envious, impressed or interested, according to their several stations, he never dreamed. To him the glances leveled at his chest were jeering glances, "Look-at-that-you've-got-a-crust" glances. . . . He took to wearing the sweater with a buttoned coat above it, and finally he stopped wearing it altogether. He hid it away. To Weary, who quizzed him, he said savagely, "Why remind 'em?" To other inquirers among his closer friends he intimated that he had lent the sweater to a girl. . . .

A definite morbidity took possession of him. He ceased to particularize; the football fiasco occupied his

thoughts less and less as time went on, and his general inefficiency more and more. This latter notion, offspring of the first, grew to unbelievable proportions. He was no-account. He would amount to nothing.

Perhaps you will have to be very young, and shaken to the roots of your soul, to understand him.

There was one good result of all this. Because he was much alone in his room, avoiding companionship, he studied; and his grades achieved unprecedented heights. He had never been a brilliant student; he was not now; but he had become a diligent one, and it told. He passed his examinations in June, his final finals, easily . . . though not so easily as Weary Haynes, who seldom, in the vernacular, "cracked" a book.

It was a relief to graduate, to go away from there, even though the pall of that ruined year went with him. It was a relief to leave Weary, whom he loved. The matter-of-fact magnificence of Weary. To Weary's insistence that they spend the summer together somewhere in the south of France ("Let's not let life get real and earnest *yet* a while, Jeff!") he turned deaf ears. He was not even tempted.

The first of July found him in New York—which, because of its cruelty, its colossal carelessness, its myriads who are cleverer, stronger, richer, higher up, no matter how high or rich or strong or clever one may be, was the very worst place in the world for him.

He had an uncle in New York, his mother's brother, Peter Lambert, of Lambert and Company, Publishers. For years it had been casually understood that when

Jeffry finished college he would go to work for his uncle; and lately they had had some definite correspondence on the matter. "The job," Peter Lambert had written, a month before Commencement, "awaits you. That's all it is, Jeff—a 'job.' Whether or not it becomes in due time a 'position' depends on you, precisely as it would if you and I were strangers."

This was strategic, but not altogether true. Peter Lambert was a bachelor, and owner of his business; Jeffry, fatherless since childhood, was his favorite among several nephews. He thought of him paternally, with fondness and with faith. He planned, he had always planned, to bring Jeffry up and up, until he was of the firm; until, indeed, Jeffry *was* the firm, carrying on after him. . . . Unfortunately, Jeffry divined these things, aided by hints from his mother; and in his new frame of mind they distressed and frightened him. He pondered them long. And in the end, deciding that he could not disappoint his uncle by falling down on the job, he hurt him sorely by declining to try it at all, on the ground that he didn't believe the publishing game appealed to him.

He took a very small apartment (his University Club, where he could have lived more comfortably, was too much the University for his mood) and went hunting for work. He thought he would sell bonds. Everybody did. Almost anybody, apparently, could.

Accordingly, every morning for many successive mornings, he subwayed down to Wall Street and lower Broadway, and knocked at various and sundry doors.

Sometimes he gained admittance, oftener he did not. Two things militated against him. One was that summer's bumper campus crop of would-be bond salesmen; a supply far in excess of the demand. The other was his manner of approach. He always entered thinking, "I suppose I won't get this," "Not a chance here, of course,"—and this showed in his bearing, which was timid, even apologetic, so that office boys dared to bully him and stenographers to say at once, "No. Sorry. They're not taking anybody now." Seldom did he reach the inner office of Authority; and when he did, his visits were embarrassingly brief. Out he would come again, fingering the rim of his hat, avoiding stenographers' eyes—his slim store of courage reduced just that much more.

Feeling as he felt the worthlessness of the commodity, he could not even sell Jeffry Evans.

At the end of several weeks his uncle, who had watched from afar, repeated his offer—albeit this time rather gruffly. This time Jeffry accepted. He had to accept. He was down to his last ten dollars.

The thing was too bad all around. Jeffry now firmly believed that nobody but a relative would employ him. And Peter Lambert was now convinced that this pet nephew of his would rather have gone to work for almost anyone than for him. So neither was content.

An incident of Jeffry's very first day with Lambert and Company gave him an additional mental hazard. He was introduced by his uncle to a short, brisk, smart young man with a little blond mustache and the New

York trick of seizing and clutching the eyes of his hearer with his eyes while he talked, hanging on optically like grim death. "This," said Peter Lambert, "is Mr. Price, who takes care of our publicity. My nephew, Jeffry Evans."

They clasped hands, Jeffry murmuring inarticulately, Price crying out that he was delighted; then Peter Lambert cleared his throat and proceeded. "You two ought to be pals," he said. "Same college, and all that. What was your year, Price? Twenty-three? Jeff's just out. Played football." Then, to Jeffry, "Price, here, is a great football fan. Follows the team all season. Never misses a game. Yes, indeed. Publicity certainly falls off in the fall, it certainly does!"

He chuckled fatly at this little joke, and Price's mustache rode up on the crest of his obedient smile, and Jeffry smiled too, in a faraway fleeting way. *"Never misses a game."* . . .

Price was delegated to show the new recruit around, and they set out from Lambert's office side by side. "You were on the team?" Price began, immediately, pleasantly. "I ought to remember, of course, but——"

"I was a sub," put in Jeffry. "I only played once or twice. You wouldn't know. What's in this room here?"

"Readers. Where they read the manuscripts. We'll go in there later. I want to take you downstairs first." Price was undiverted. "Evans," he repeated thoughtfully. And then, "Oh, Evans! Sure! Halfback, weren't you? Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Sure," said Price again, nodding. "I remember now. Of course."

"Of course," echoed Jeffry's mind.

From that moment on, he was uncomfortable with Price, ill-at-ease whenever he saw Price or heard his voice, believing that this fellow-alumnus with the bright inescapable eyes was always remembering, never forgetting. He thought, too, that Price spread the story gleefully around. There were men in the office who saw in this nephew of Lambert's a menace to certain of their personal hopes of future advancement. These men were afraid of him, really, and resentful because of that fear. But he thought them supercilious. He felt that Price must have told them about him, and that, like Price, they had no use for such a futile one.

However, the work was fascinating, and often it absorbed him so he quite forgot to watch the chip on his shoulder. He was very busy. In line with Peter Lambert's plan to teach him the business from every angle, from the ground up, he belonged to no set department, but labored in them all by turns. Sometimes he read manuscript, sometimes proof. Sometimes he wrote advertisements. He spent whole days at the printing plant in Brooklyn, seeing books made; he packed books for shipment, delivered copies to spectacled reviewers in newspaper offices, sold novels across the counter at one or another of the several little shops maintained and managed by the firm. Once he took a feminine poet to lunch, and found her unpoetic but quite nice. Once he accompanied the firm's star sales-

man on a trip through the middle West, listening and learning, and lugging the sample case.

His salary to start was sixty dollars a week. At the end of six months it was sixty dollars a week. At the end of a year it still was.

He was doing well, he deserved more, and his uncle was aware that he did. But Peter Lambert had got everything he had by asking for it, *not* by keeping quiet and waiting for it. He believed in demand—provided, of course, there was justice to back it up. Jeffry had not approached him on the subject of a raise. "And," vowed Jeffry's uncle to himself, "he won't get one until he does." This as a matter of discipline, a lesson. Lambert did not guess that to Jeffry it was simply another proof of his hopeless inefficiency. A whole year!—and he was worth no more than when he started. Not even worth that, probably. Receiving it only because his uncle was his uncle, and kind.

Had you encountered him about this time, you would have seen a serious, unsmiling big fellow, young except for his eyes, athletic save for the slight, beaten droop of his splendid shoulders. Had you met him, shaken his hand, you would have found him polite, but unresponsive; either preoccupied, or—or *what?* You wouldn't have known. Unless you were keen at analysis, and interested in people as persons, as problems in humanity, separate and distinct, you doubtless wouldn't have troubled to find out. You would have dismissed him. But (oddly) not forgotten him. Weeks later, passing him on the street, you would have bowed and called

him by name, suddenly and surprisedly conscious that in a vague, fragmentary way, you had been thinking of him in the interim.

Then he fell in love.

It happened without preamble, without warning; and that was the worst of it. Afterward Jeffry told himself that if he had only seen it coming, he could have headed it off—and would have. But he didn't see it. It crept on him quietly, insidiously, like fog. It was simply, suddenly *there,* obscuring all things.

On a morning in September he was called on the telephone by a half-forgotten classmate named Caruthers, who, it appeared, had written a book. Caruthers was on from his home town, which Jeffry's mind dimly identified as Johnstown, or possibly Williamsburg, for the purpose of placing his book with a New York publishing house; and he wanted to know whether, if he submitted the manuscript to Jeffry's uncle's firm, Jeffry would personally guarantee that somebody—preferably his uncle, but failing that, "somebody who means something"—read it.

"All I ask," Caruthers asked, "is a reading. That's all. Just a reading. You see, I know this publishing racket. If I simply send it in, without a word, it won't be read. They never are. Don't tell *me!*"

Jeffry promised that *Clinging Vines* by Rodney H. Caruthers should be read, thoroughly and discerningly; and he also agreed, albeit without undue enthusiasm, to be taken to lunch that day by the grateful author.

They met in the lobby of the Algonquin, where Caruthers (having heard that it was literary) was staying, and exchanged the feverish "Well, well, wells" of two who never knew one another well at all, but are striving to overlook the fact. Caruthers was long and thin, with a pear-shaped head of which his brown string necktie was the stem. He wore spectacles, and talked stentoriously. Everybody in the Algonquin restaurant knew within two minutes of his entrance that he had achieved not merely a novel, but the Gr. Am. novel—though it must be acknowledged that they concealed the excitement they no doubt felt about this, perfectly.

Toward the end of a meal which seemed to Jeffry doomed to endlessness, Caruthers interrupted himself long enough to inquire what his old classmate was going to do that evening. Jeffry said, after only a tiny pause, "Why—nothing." He heard himself saying it with astonishment. It of course committed him to the further society of this merciless egotist; he could have fibbed out of it with ease, and he was at loss to understand why he had not.

The truth was that Caruthers was flattering Jeffry. He felt that Jeffry was important to him, and he treated him with deference and respect. Jeffry in his sore heart wanted more of this—much more, at whatever cost.

"I know a little girl," observed Caruthers now (and Jeffry had a quick bleak picture of the kind of little girl Caruthers would know), "from my home town. Bar-

bara Kincaid, her name is. Awfully nice kid. She has an apartment down in Greenwich Village—she's over here designing, or something. I rang her up this morning, and got her to break a date she had for tonight. I'm going to take her to dinner. Like to have you join us, Jeff."

"Thanks," said Jeffry. "I—I'd like to."

Her apartment was the first shock. Huge studio room, rough-walled, high-ceilinged, tasteful and beautiful. Lamps under odd-shaped parchment shades, diffusing low soft gold. Dark things, velvet things to sit on and lie on—and sudden flaming gorgeous splashes of color. Books in long cases, unglassed. *Good* books.

Her voice was the second shock. Soft and laughing-cool, and just a trifle breathless, as if she feared she might be interrupted before the end of each sentence. "Hello, Rod Caruthers!" she said from the doorway. And then, "Oh! How nice. You've brought someone——"

The third shock was dizzying. Not the studio, the setting, not even the voice, had prepared him properly. Blond she was, slim—tinted like a gay bouquet in which an artist florist had blended yellow, scarlet, pink and cream. An exquisite person. At first glance, a light and frivolous person, belonging to the world of shine and bubbles and string bands. Then you saw her eyes. And her peaked firm chin. And the eyebrows, dark and straight and rather heavy, that punctuated and remarked her face. And the hands. Intelligent. Restless, pale. Hands with temperament.

She said to Jeffry, "I am very glad you came." And Jeffry knew that she was genuinely glad. His mind, ever ready with explanations of things complimentary to himself, explained this at once. Caruthers bored Miss Barbara Kincaid, naturally; though she was sweet to him, it was not hard to guess that only dutifully, through a feeling that she ought, had she accorded this evening to this former acquaintance from Johnstown (or was it Williamsburg?); and she would have been glad to see almost anyone who would relieve her of a tête-à-tête with him.

Nevertheless, Jeffry was pleased. To be so welcome to such a girl, no matter what her reason, was a pleasant, an exhilarating thing.

They had cocktails at the studio before they left, cocktails mixed by Barbara, cunningly, and shaken up with all his might by Jeffry. Pink cocktails, foamy-frosted, two apiece. Caruthers talked about his book. He sat holding his goblet, waving it, threatening at any instant to drop it or spatter the walls with its contents, talking and talking and talking about his book. He said, "Jeff is going to see to it that it gets a fair reading," and both he and Barbara looked gravely at Jeffry, and Jeffry felt warm, expansive, big. A man who could see to things. . . .

"I should think," observed Barbara, at the first break in Caruthers' monologue, "that the publishing business would be awfully interesting. Isn't it?"

"It certainly is," Jeffry said.

"Tell me about it."

Again they were looking at him. Expectant-eyed. Caruthers, whose mouth had opened to continue, closed it again. The girl leaned forward a little, propped her chin on her hand.

"What would you like to know?" Jeffry asked her.

"Oh—everything. You see," she said simply, with a little indicative flick of white fingers, "I'm mad about books. I buy them when I can't afford cream for my coffee, or—gin for my grenadine! Tell me *what* I buy. Just exactly what went into the making of—this?" She touched a book that lay on the table beside her.

"Toil," sighed Caruthers dramatically. "The toil and the tears and the dreams of some poor wretch like me."

"Yes," said Barbara, still looking at Jeffry, "—but after that?"

He told her. He described, he explained, he gesticulated. Encouraged and drawn out of himself by Barbara's eyes, her intentness, her questions, he talked glibly and well, without diffidence. "You really ought to see for yourself," he wound up. "You ought to let me take you through our plant, and show you."

"Would you?" she said, with either eagerness or a most perfect counterfeit.

This early success at conversation carried him into the evening. He found he could talk of other things to those listening gray eyes; not only of books, but of plays and places—anything that came up. He could *talk!* He could even make her laugh now and then. He wasn't so bad! At least he knew that nothing he

said was as idiotic as anything and everything pompously said by Caruthers. . . .

During dinner he was reminded, by a chance remark of Barbara's about her shop, that Caruthers had told him she did designing, or something. This suddenly became exceedingly important. Just what did she do? What sort of designing? Where was the shop? How long had she had it?

He put down his fork and regarded her solemnly, wide-eyed. Such a little soft young thing! Making her living! Good Lord!

"The shop," replied Barbara, "is on Madison Avenue, between Fifty-second and Fifty-third. It's the very littlest shop in New York, and the cutest—if I do say so as shouldn't. I've had it three years, and it's called *Bal Masque,* and we make fancy dress costumes. Let's see—what else did you ask me?"

"Who's we?"

"I am we," Barbara said. "Then I've three girls who sew. I design, and they manufacture. I used to have a partner, Sonia Surles—her real name was Esther—but she got married."

"I'm not surprised," Caruthers put in owlishly. "I saw her. Distinctly the marrying kind."

"Fancy dress costumes," mused Jeffry aloud.

Barbara nodded. *"And* original ones. I have never in my life," she added, buttering a roll, "turned out a Pierrette and, so help me, I never shall."

"Not a Pierrot either?" Jeffry queried.

"No men's costumes," Barbara said.

"No?"

"No."

He felt strangely relieved. No men, eh? None of the sideburned, romantic-looking birds who attended fancy-dress balls (it seemed to him they were always sideburned and romantic-looking) came to her shop. . . . Later on, recalling this relief and its cause, he thought he should have known then and there what was happening to him. But that was later.

They went from dinner to a play, and from the theater to a supper club, and from that supper club to another like it, and thence to a third. This was known as "giving Rod a whirl," and was done by Barbara and Jeffry with the customary relentlessness of New Yorkers entertaining out-of-towners. Caruthers reacted in the customary way. He became a little drunk. He became quite drunk. At the second supper club he quarreled with a waiter, clinching the argument with a shouted, "Know who I am? Well, I'm *Rodney H. Caruthers!*" At the third supper club he thrust out a roguish foot and almost, not quite, floored a cabaret girl in the throes of a buck-and-wing. In the taxicab leaving the third supper club he wept, and then slept. They drove him to his hotel, and gave him to the doorman.

"And," sighed Barbara, leaning thankfully back in her seat, *"that's* settled! Whew! What an evening!"

Through the half-gloom of the foot or two of space between them she glanced at Jeffry sideways, upward, and smiled. His hand lay on his knee, and she touched

it lightly. "Thank heaven for *you,*" she said. "It would have been deadly with just Rod."

"He wasn't so good, was he?" Jeffry answered.

"Awful. If anything," Barbara stated, "worse sober than tight. I got to the point where I thought if he said *one more word* about his book——" She checked herself; laughed, a little apologetically. "Poor old Rod," she said. "He's really nice. . . . Does this taxicab driver know where he's going, Jeff? Or is he just going?"

"He knows. I gave him your address."

"You *remembered* it?"

"Sure." He repeated it.

"Amazing!" said Barbara, shaking her head. "Remarkable mind! Tell me, how is Addison Sims of Seattle?"

Jeffry ignored this. He had thought of something. "See here!" he exclaimed, sitting bolt upright excitedly, turning to her, "maybe you don't have to go home yet, hmm?"

"Oh, yes, I——"

"We can go to another night club," Jeffry pursued, his eagerness soaring. Incredible that this had not occurred to him before! "Oh, come on, Barbara," he said. "It isn't late. We'll have a couple more dances, and something to eat—— You're hungry, aren't you? Why, you must be! You haven't had a thing to eat since dinner, and now it's——"

"Four A.M." Barbara laughed. "I'd love to, Jeff. But—ask me again. I'm a business woman, you know.

With an alarm-clock." She sighed. "The darn thing works, too!"

It was plain that she was not to be persuaded; but Jeffry could not drop the subject. He had glimpsed Paradise, and now he fought for it doggedly, frantically. It *wasn't* four A.M. Impossible. And anyway, what if it *was?* She could make up sleep tomorrow night. . . . Thus he pleaded. And thus he tarnished the memorable shine of his golden evening. For by forcing Barbara to repeat her refusal, twice, thrice, more and more firmly, he reminded himself that she probably didn't like him, really; he had been merely the lesser of two evils, after all.

He relapsed into moody silence, and maintained it, save for an occasional monosyllable when common politeness demanded, the rest of the way.

There was a moment at the door of her apartment house when he thought he might have been mistaken. Her gray lifted eyes were so seemingly sincere, her voice when she said, "I'll see you soon, Jeff?" sounded so as if she wanted to, that his breath came short, his pulses pounded, and he hoped again. He seized her hands. *"Don't* go in, Barbara. Please. Don't end it yet. Let's drive back uptown and have just a sandwich or something. *Please!* I'll bring you back in an hour, honestly I will."

She smiled, shaking her head. "It's too late. Oh, Jeff, don't be silly! There are other evenings."

"But tonight's *tonight!"* he cried desperately. "How do I know I'll ever——" He broke off. Stared at her.

Flung down her hands. He picked up his hat from the parquet where it had fallen, and rammed it on. "I'm sorry you were bored," he said bitterly, low, and turning, strode to his cab and slammed himself in.

An absurd performance. Two seconds afterward he knew that it had been; and shame boiled in him, and he writhed. *Now.* What must she think of him *now?* Oh, fool! Fathead! Simpleton!

Half way home he halted his cab and telephoned her from a drug store, poured halting, stammered apologies into the transmitter. He heard her soft laugh. "Of course," she said, "you're forgiven." She laughed again. "Child. . . . *Who* spoiled you so?"

He did not sleep at all well, and in the later morning, when he arose and dressed and went to work, he felt quite ill, and physically bent with the load of his depression. He spent the greater part of the forenoon in scowling out of windows, picking things up and putting them down, starting when people spoke to him, querying, "What did you say?" During his lunch hour he walked up Madison Avenue almost to Fifty-third, and looked at the shop called *Bal Masque.* Just looked at it. There was little to see. A window with a single stunning costume on display against a black velvet background. A door with a curtain of pleated net behind its plate glass. He walked on slowly to the corner, and crossed, and looked at it again from the other side, attentively and long. Once the door opened and his heart jumped . . . and sank. Just somebody. Somebody else. Nobody.

Caruthers presented himself in the afternoon to ask whether his manuscript had yet been read. It had not. "But," said Jeffry, suddenly effusively cordial, "don't rush off, Rod. Sit down. Sit here. I'm not busy at all, really. Er—how're you feeling, after last night?"

Caruthers moaned. He clasped his forehead, closed his eyes, and besought Jeffry not to mention it.

"Damn' shame," Jeffry commiserated. "You did have quite a snootful, though. Remember that fracas with the waiter?"

Caruthers opened his eyes. They were blank, inquiring, blinking. But Jeffry let them blink. "That was funny," he said, and hurried on: "Have you seen what's-her-name—Miss Kincaid—today?"

"I 'phoned her," said Caruthers, "and apologized."

"Yeah?" Jeffry's voice was casual. Too casual. You would not have thought that Miss Kincaid interested him even less than the waiter—but you would have known he was trying to give that impression.

He lit a cigarette, waved the match out, flicked it over his shoulder. "Very nice girl," he commented, blowing smoke.

"Peach," Caruthers assented.

"You've known her a long time?"

"Since she was *that* high. She used to play paper dolls with my little sister."

"She's not very old, then," Jeffry remarked.

"Twenty-one, I think," said Caruthers. "Just."

"Pretty young to be in business for herself, isn't she?"

"I should say!" Caruthers said. "And do you know what she *makes?*" He leaned toward Jeffry, lowering his voice confidentially. "Fifteen or twenty thousand a year—if she makes a penny!"

"Fact?"

"Absolutely. I happen to know."

There was a silence. Caruthers tilted back his chair, squinted an authorish squint at a crack in the ceiling. "Some day," he averred impressively, "I'm going to put her in a story. She's *material,* that girl. Her rise, her beauty, her affairs of the heart——"

He thought upon these things with satisfaction for a moment. Then his chair's legs thumped the floor, and he rose. "I must go," he said. "Really, I must. I've an appointment with a chap. Editor chap."

"She's had a lot of them?" Jeffrey said.

"She's had—oh. Barbara. Affairs of the heart? Well, I should say!" Caruthers said. "She's got a hundred men in love with her——"

Jeffry sat long where Caruthers left him, twisting a pencil around and around in his fingers, and sometimes marking with it, without knowing what he marked. The new green blotter on the desk before him became scarred with assorted scrawlings. *"Bal Masque"* appeared several times, "$15,000.00" with an interrogation point after it once, "$20,000.00," also queried. Below these, $60.00 was multiplied by fifty-two, and the result scratched out with angry black. In the center of the blotter "100-1" was writ large, and framed in numerous thoughtful concentric squares.

He decided to forget her. He said to himself, naïvely, that there wasn't any use getting interested in her. A girl like that, who counted her income in five figures, and her suitors in three. He would put her out of his mind. Now. Immediately. And for all time.

Having settled this, and emphasized it with a blow of his fist on the desk, and washed it down with a cup of water from the cooler in the corner, he telephoned her and asked her to dine with him that evening.

She couldn't, or wouldn't. She had, she said, a previous engagement. She was terribly sorry; and would Jeffry surely try her again *very* soon?

He hung up the receiver with a decisive sharp click of finality. Well, that was that. It was just as he'd thought: she didn't like him, she didn't care to see him again. Oh, she was polite, of course! But he comprehended. He wouldn't call her any more. He wouldn't bother her. Thank God, he had sense enough to know when he wasn't wanted. . . .

The next day, however, the sun was shining, and the air was tonic and brisk, and the high-heeled women on the Avenue were smartly sleek in new clothes; and it came to Jeffry, returning to the office from an errand downtown in mid-morning, that maybe she really *had* had an engagement, after all. He swung along for two blocks more, and decided that of *course* she had had. Inevitably. She would. She was the kind that of necessity kept a little gilt-edged dated book: "Tom tea Ritz Friday five," "Jimmy lunch Crillon Monday twelve." You couldn't expect to get her on two hours' notice—

nor on two days' notice, even! Of course. He could have laughed now at his yesterday's presumption.

In the office he sought a telephone behind a door that would lock, and rang her at her place of business. He said, "This is Jeffry Evans again," and she sang, "Oh, hel-*lo* there!"—as if she were delighted that it was.

Jeffry sat back in his swivel chair, carrying the instrument with him, digging its felted rim firmly into his chest. "Listen," he said, "when *can* you go to dinner, hmm?"

"Why——"

"Name your own time. Any time you say."

"We-ell," Barbara said, "let's see. How is Saturday?"

Saturday was not very good, because it was four days off; but Jeffry took it, without argument. "Write me down," he directed, "in the little book."

"I don't have to," Barbara said.

(*Well!*)

He got almost no work done in the next four days, but he did get a new dinner jacket made. And a hat and a stick and a tie and a flask and some theater tickets bought. And a corsage of orchids ordered. And a Packard town car with a liveried chauffeur engaged. And a table reserved. It cannot be said, in short, that he was idle. But in spite of his manifold occupations, his shoppings and fittings and trips to the bank, there were empty hours, and maddeningly many of them. He devoted them for the most part to the manufacture of

delicate compliments and scintillating *bon mots,* for delivery in the Packard town car.

The best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft aglee—but they do not always. Jeffry's party for two was a smooth and flawless and wonderful thing, even surpassing anticipation. One couldn't, of course, anticipate Barbara. She was lovelier than one's most bewitching visions of her, more gracious than one's fondest, brightest hopes.

She liked Jeffry.

That was the wine of the evening. She *liked* him! She didn't seem to know that he was dull, and not worth while; she seemed to think him altogether charming. Her eyes said, "I like you. You interest me." Her mouth curved sweetly to smile. Once, in the restaurant, she cried out, "Oh, Jeff, I'm having *such* a good time!" Champagne, in gulps. It intoxicated him. He saw everything through its shimmering haze, and his ears were loud with its ringing. He had never within his recollection been so happy; not even long ago, before a crash in a roaring dusk broke the blithe young careless heart and spirit of him.

It was dawn when he took her home. They had been, as Barbara said, "pretty nearly everywhere." They had danced miles, on rhythmic obedient feet, called by the silver horns. Now they were quiet, and dreamily tired; a little sad, too, with the slipping away of something precious that had been theirs, that might not ever—who ever knows?—be again. Barbara's left hand lay locked in Jeffry's right in the seat between them.

Her shoulder grazed his upper arm. They sat low on their spines, relaxed, resting. Extended before them on the let-down seats their shoes, big black ones, small glistening arched ones, stirred slightly with the motion of the car.

Barbara said, "I don't feel like talking."

"I don't either."

After a moment her hand pressed his. "You're so—*comfortable,* Jeff. It's as if I'd known you—almost always."

Their kiss was brief, unpremeditated. One instant they were smiling at one another, blue eyes into gray in the half-light. The next their lips were touching; softly, swiftly, like children's lips. A kiss to remember the night, and to go with the dawn.

Afterward they rode a little closer together, they held hands a little tighter. But there were no more kisses. Jeffry in that moment was wise with a wisdom that later he marveled at. Too very wise to lose a fragrance in a flame.

When he reached home, Weary's telegram was waiting.

"It come right after you went out," said the elevator boy. Jeffry took it, frowning. Like many people who receive but few, he was afraid of telegrams.

He had time, while the elevator shot to his floor, to note the signature below the long blue-printed message; and as he stepped out and fumbled for his key he wondered why the tiny first clutch of terror, the sense of

imminent catastrophe, was not relieved. Certainly it should have been. Weary, now in Chicago, was a notably poor correspondent—and several times in the past he had wired fifty facetious words to take the place of a letter long overdue. "That's what this is," Jeffry told himself. "That's all it is."

But his hands were cold.

Inside his apartment door, standing just inside, with his hat still on and his door key biting into his palm, he read the telegram:

KILL THE FATTED CALF DRESS THE AVENUE IN FLAGS AND WRESTLE DOWN THE MURPHY BED FOR GOOD I ARRIVE TOMORROW CENTURY TO TAKE CHARGE PROMOTION OUR NEW YORK OFFICE APPOINTMENT VERY SUDDEN BUT PERMANENT AND BOY HOW SWELL MEET ME

WEARY

Jeffry met him. He had had no sleep to speak of, and perhaps this fact accounted for the barely perceptible listlessness of his welcome, the lack, in a degree or two, of the fervor that was fitting. He explained it to Weary. "I was up all night."

"You look it," Weary said cheerfully. "You look like hell."

Weary himself was looking very striking, very picturesque and brown and debonair. Jeffry had forgotten that he looked like that, quite. Like a Greek god. Like a school-girl's description of her Love. . . . Of course Weary had always been handsome; but had he

always been so superbly, spectacularly so? Had women always striven to catch his eye, as these women they passed in the crowded station were doing?

Jeffry all at once recalled that at first sight of Weary, years ago, he had thought him the best-looking boy he had even seen. The ensuing years of their intimacy had accustomed him to this physical perfection, so that it had slipped his mind, in a way. Now he saw it again. It struck him full force, adding its tithe to the heaviness within him.

They taxied to Jeffry's apartment, hemmed in by incredible baggage: suitcases, golf clubs, a saxophone, a case of liquor in a chest marked "Community Plate." Weary talked all the way, occasionally thumping and pummeling Jeffry, now and then uttering a war whoop of sheer young animal glee. They were going to have, he announced, the time of their lives. *Parties?* Jeffry would see. For a starter, they were going to give up Jeffry's apartment, and get a bigger and better one. . . .

He was still planning when they reached the apartment; and the transfer of his effects from taxicab to elevator, from elevator to center of living room floor, was made to the accompaniment of a running monologue on the house-warming that would be staged in the new apartment, and the classmates and friends who would be hailed to the house-warming.

"How, by the way," said Weary as an after-thought, "are you fixed for women?"

He had by this time discarded his coat and vest, and thrown himself down in Jeffry's deepest chair. There

he was. To stay. Weary, sunburned and flashing. Jeffry glanced at him . . . glanced quickly off.

"I don't know any," he said.

"Wha-at?"

"Fact. I don't."

"Not a one?" Weary was appalled—and unbelieving. "Who were you out with last night, then?" he demanded.

Jeffry bent over the pile of luggage. "Just some fellows. Fellows from the office. Let's stow this stuff some place, out of the way, shall we?"

He was conscious, as he lifted and carried and helped unpack, of a relief that amounted almost to rapture. A crisis passed. He had told his story; now he would stick to it, and Weary needn't know, needn't enter in at all. . . . He felt *safe*. He became, all in a moment, merry. He began to rejoice to see Weary. Good old Weary. Best guy in the world. . . .

But an incident of the very next day toppled his house of cards, and he was safe no longer. He was lost.

Early in the morning Weary betook himself to his new office; and when they parted, Jeffry said, "If you get a chance during the day, drop over. I want you to meet my uncle, and see where I slave, and all."

Weary arrived about four in the afternoon. Jeffry, performing some duty in an outer office in which there were numbers of youthful feminine clerks, was apprized of his coming by the little flutter that began at the door and went through the room like a breeze, tilting faces up, sending hands to coiffures in a hurry.

Weary was radiant, buoyant. He had much to tell, and when he and Jeffry were shut into privacy, he told it, joyously. Everything was great. Everybody had been fine to him, and he was to have a corking private office with his name on the door—— "The fellow was lettering it when I blew in"—and *what* a secretary! And really very little to do. Really a pipe job, absolutely.

"Isn't it the damnedest thing," Weary said, "how the higher the salary the easier the work? Never knew it to fail. Here I was getting six thou, in Chicago, with commissions. In New York I'm going to get ten to start, for agitating myself just about *half* as much——"

He broke off, and regarded the door, and Jeffry also regarded the door, saying, "Come in," because someone had knocked.

Barbara came in. Barbara in a tan dress and a small enchanting hat, with a pair of former foxes, the teeth of one sunk forever into the flank of the other, slanted round her shoulders.

"Am I—interrupting?" she asked hesitantly, from the threshold.

"Not at all," said Weary, before Jeffry could speak.

Barbara smiled at him; smiled at Jeffry; came all the way in, and closed the door. "I was going by—" she addressed Jeffry "—and I thought I'd stop. You know you said any time I wanted to see the plant——"

"Of course," agreed Jeffry, stiff-lipped. He looked at Weary. "This is Weary Haynes. Miss Kincaid."

"How do you do?" said Barbara.

"I'm very happy to meet you," Weary said.

They looked so like a magazine-cover, that beautiful pair, shaking hands. . . .

"Take this chair," directed Weary. He had become master of ceremonies, naturally and at once. He held the chair for Barbara, then seated himself at ease on the corner of Jeffry's desk.

"You're not interrupting," he repeated, beaming down at her. "I should say not. This isn't a business conference—it's part of a reunion! To join which," he assured her, "you are invited. Not to say urged."

"A reunion?"

Weary nodded. "Jeff and I used to room together."

"Oh, really?"

"He hasn't told you about me," Weary deduced mournfully. "But then—he didn't tell me about you, either. In fact—" here Weary fixed Jeffry with a stern accusing eye "—in fact, I seem to recall his telling me, not twenty-four hours ago, that he didn't know any girls in New York. How 'bout that, Jeff?"

"I——"

"He forgot me," Barbara proclaimed. She made a little face. "Just a girl that men forget," she sighed, mock-tragically.

"*Not* men of sanity," Weary said. "Never. Never in the world."

Jeffry showed them through the plant. He did it mechanically, stalking in and out of elevators, down long corridors ahead of them—pausing and turning when occasion demanded, saying, "This is the business

office." "Proof-readers in this room." Mere statements, without elaboration. Every time he spoke he interrupted something amusing and bright that Weary was saying. Weary would cease, he and Barbara would look in and murmur appropriate comments; then they would move on, Weary resuming, Barbara listening appreciatively. The inspection tour took twenty minutes. Jeffry was glad when it was over, and felt that they were glad. It had been a bore.

They drifted back to Jeffry's little office and had cigarettes. Then Barbara consulted a dot of a watch set in diamonds and platinum, and said she must go. "So must I," Weary echoed, rising instantly.

He took his hat from the telephone, where he had hung it on entering, and confronted Jeffry. "Can you break off now, old man? Or will I see you later at the flat?"

"Later," Jeffry said, because he could feel that they wanted him to say that.

Barbara came close and dimpled up at him, patting his coat lapel. " 'Bye, Jeff," she said. "Thanks so much. It's been fun."

"I'm afraid not."

"But really! I loved it."

Weary was holding the door ajar. Barbara smiled once more at Jeffry, and wriggled her fingers, and turned and went; and Weary said, "So long, kid," and went also. And the door fell shut.

"There she goes," said Jeffry slowly, half-aloud. "There—she——"

The rest was lost in an oath that was not an oath, but a sort of prayer.

He gave them a ten-minute head start. Then he, too, left, and went home. Weary's trunks had been delivered at the apartment, and dumped in the living room. Two of them. Very big ones. He sat and gazed at them. After a long time he moved into his bedroom, for no particular reason, and sat on the edge of the bed and gazed at nothing.

Weary returned about seven o'clock, whistling and snapping on lights. "Jeff!" he shouted from the living room.

"I'm here."

Weary joined him. He was in high spirits. "Hullo!" he said. "What ho! And how is Lambert and Company's pride?" He began ridding his pockets of letters and change, his watch and his wallet, laying them all on Jeffry's chiffonier. "I'm late," he observed, "because I took the Glorious Baby to tea."

"You did?"

"Yeah. I did." Weary, in the act of unfastening the fraternity pin from his vest, wheeled around. "Say," he said, "what was the idea? Why didn't you tell me about her?"

"I—didn't think," Jeffry answered with difficulty. "I don't know her very well——"

"Don't you like her?"

For a racking instant Jeffry thought he was going to make a fool of himself, going to throw himself on Weary's mercy, crying, "Like her? I *love* her! Oh,

God—let her *alone,* will you, Weary? Give me a *chance!*" He had to fight himself, to keep this back.

He won.

"She's all right," he said indifferently.

"She's marvelous!" Weary declared. "If you weren't such a woman-hater——" He left the sentence there. He thought a minute, unbuttoning his vest with absent fingers. "Well," he said, "then there's no reason why I shouldn't press my suit, as they say in the subtitles?

"Much as it needs it," he added, holding out his vest with both hands, "I do not mean the suit you see before you."

He waited.

"No reason," said Jeffry, "that I know of."

Then he was the onlooker. He was the confidant, the Ear, for Weary's detailed reports of progress. He was the mutual friend to whom they said, "Come on along with us, Jeff. We'd love to have you!" He rarely went. The pain of staying at home alone and following them in his mind was torturing; but the pain of watching them—so magnificent, so *right* together—was worse.

They were together constantly, teaing, dining, dancing. They went to football games away from town; they motored far in Weary's new machine. Once they attended a weekend party in Connecticut, as guests of Barbara's former business partner and her husband, who had taken the usual fancy to Weary. It was during that weekend that Jeffry went one night and looked at the River. He did it because it seemed the thing for

a man as wretched as he was to do; he was amazed to find when he got there that he had no real inclination to throw himself in.

He lent Weary cravats to dazzle Barbara, money to buy her flowers. His salary was still sixty dollars a week, Weary's was three times that—but he spent nothing, while Weary spent more than he made. His telephone calls to Barbara were all calls in Weary's behalf. "Listen, Barbara, Weary says to tell you he'll be a few minutes late." . . . Things like that. His living room table, which was now half Weary's living room table, held a photograph of her in a silver frame; the eyes of it followed him everywhere, everywhere.

Weary was always talking about her. Discussing, speculating, asking advice. "She's the funniest girl," he assured Jeffry once. "No fooling, now, she is. For instance—she won't let me kiss her. Can you imagine a girl like that?"

"No," said Jeffry.

Weary reddened. "Hell," he said, "I didn't mean—I didn't mean *me,* for Heaven's sake! I meant, can you imagine a girl that simply won't be kissed—in this age of quick and easy osculations?" He grew reflective, rubbing his chin in a way he had. "Sometimes," he remarked, "sometimes I think she must be in love with somebody."

"Who?"

"I haven't an idea. Have you?"

"No," said Jeffry.

And he hadn't.

His lease expired on the first of November, and he and Weary moved. The new apartment was spacious and expensive—too expensive, Jeffry thought. Weary, however, was deaf to all protests. "Pipe down," he said. "It's a short life. Why spend it where the plaster's dirty?"

They bought new furniture, carpets and curtains, and the effect was good. But it didn't suit Weary. On the Sunday afternoon when they were finally settled, their last book tucked in place, their final picture hung, he paced around, hands in his trousers pockets, scowling into corners and at the walls. "It could be better," he said. "It needs something. I don't know just exactly what, but something.

"Barbara'll know," he concluded. "*By* the way! Have we got cakes, and all that junk? She's coming to tea."

"When?"

"Today. In—" Weary took out his watch—" in half an hour, if she's on time. Which she probably won't be."

Jeffry sat motionless for a moment. Then he shambled to his feet. "We've got cakes," he said, "I guess. I told the biddy to get some. There's tea in that can marked 'Sugar,' and sugar around somewhere. Cream on the ice. If you want lemons, I'll stop at Luigi's on my way out and have some sent——"

"You're not going out?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Oh, now, Jeff," said Weary, earnestly, "stick

around. You ought to be here. It's your place as well as mine, you know."

"But it's—your girl."

There was a slight pause. Then Jeffry strolled on into his bedroom, rolling down his sleeves as he went. He felt aimless. He had to tell himself, with words in his mind, just what to do. Snap cuff-links. Comb hair. Tie tie. . . .

"Jeff!"

"What?"

"Come back here!"

He obeyed indifferently, holding the ends of his tie in both hands. "What do you want?"

Weary was sitting on the divan, looking solemn. Looking at Jeffry. "You ass," he said, "she's in love with you."

Jeffry merely stared at him.

"God help me," said Weary, "for telling you. She made me swear I wouldn't—but you'll never wake up and hear the birdies sing unless I do. I'm convinced of that."

"What," asked Jeffry, "are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Barbara. She's in love with you. *Love,*" Weary repeated. "L-o-v-e. *Amo, amas, amat*—and all that sort of thing." He moaned abruptly, and seized his saxophone from a neighboring chair, brandishing it aloft. "My God! Have I got to *beat* it in? What *is* that object you call your head? Just a parking place for teeth? Or does it work?"

"Say what you said again," said Jeffry.

"She's in love with you."

"Barbara?"

"Barbara."

"What makes you think so?"

"She told me!" cried Weary, his patience frayed. "She told me the first—no, the second time I ever saw her. I tried to sell myself—and what happened? I got enlisted! Committee of one, to try to make you jealous—so you'd wake up." He made a wry face. "She picked me," he said, "because I'd be the most conspicuous—to you, d'you see? But *you!*—blind, dumb and unconscious *you*——"

"Wait," begged Jeffry, "wait a minute." He was thinking hard; his lips were moving. "She—she could have had——"

He stopped, overcome; and in that dazzling instant all his ideas about himself shifted as a backfield shifts, in one swift simultaneous leap. He was in place again, mentally. He had courage once more, and faith in himself. For the man whom *Barbara* preferred to Weary—to *Weary!*—well, that man must not be such a dud, after all.

He lifted his glistening eyes, and met Weary's eyes, which had watched him with affection and rejoicing from the divan.

"Eureka!" said Weary. "It penetrates. At last, it penetrates! And—" His voice softened. "You're crazy about her, aren't you? I wasn't sure. She was pretty sure—but I wasn't absolutely. I see now."

He stood up. *"This* baby," he declared, tapping his

chest, "will get the lemons. He may even pick them—so don't expect him soon."

For fully three minutes after the door banged shut, Jeffry stayed in his chair. He was seeing things he had not seen. He was understanding things he had misunderstood. He was seeping himself in heavenly realization.

Then he thought of the time.

He bolted into his bedroom, changed his suit, borrowed a shirt of Weary's, shaved. He emerged immaculate, rushed to the kitchenette, and there wildly broke things and upset things. Presently he said, "Oh, the hell with tea!" and returned to the living room. Five minutes of five.

He sat down, and placed his watch on the arm of his chair, face upward, and waited an hour. Then he looked again—and it was four minutes of five.

He thought of Barbara's little watch. Diamonds and platinum. Diamonds. And platinum. He thought about it for quite a while, while his watch ticked seconds. Then he got up, his jaw set hard, and marched to the telephone.

He called up his uncle.

"Listen," he said, "I've just been thinking, and—well, the fact is—I've got to have more money. A whole *lot* more," he insisted stubbornly. "I—" He swallowed. "I'll *quit* if I don't!"

"Now why," growled his uncle, "why in tarnation didn't you say so *before?*"

On his gay way back to the chair where his watch lay,

he stopped; and when his feet moved again, it was off at a tangent, into his bedroom. He dug into the depths of his lowest bureau drawer—and bye-and-bye he dragged out something. Something woolen and scarlet. And lettered in white.

He bore this into the living room and arranged it on a chair-back. Carelessly, as if he had just taken it off. Yet carefully, with the letter showing—so that, in case no one had told her, she would know that he had been a football player.

GAUDY LADY

GAUDY LADY

SHE was not young. The things about her that had youth were the purchasable things: the gowns she wore, the slanted hats, the small, tall slippers; the haircut, and the glint of red in her hair. They didn't deceive you. She was forty-odd, despite them. And her eyes in their sticky, starry frames were as old and as tired as the world.

Mrs. Jenny Montgomery.

She lived in New York. She belonged to New York, so utterly, so unmistakably, that people from out of town stared fascinated as she passed, and remembered her, along with Ziegfeld's new theater, and the Pennsylvania Roof, and Times Square jeweled for evening, when they went home. "Those New York women." . . . Provincial matrons, observing that her hose were sheer black chiffon, returned to report to their Tuesday Bridge Clubs that sheer black chiffon hosiery was the thing now in New York—although the ratio of tan to black beheld by them might have been a thousand pairs to one.

To see her was to wonder who she was. Were you provincial or Manhattan-born, you wondered. She had an air of being someone not quite respectable; a lady just a little *declassée*. There were her eyes. There were

her slanted hats. There was her mouth, done freshly in thick wine-red salve upon a skin dead-white as lily petals. The mistress of a fat man with a limousine, perhaps? The Woman in a vaudeville skit? The husky-throated hostess at a Broadway supper club?

You could not guess. You only knew that drama touched with sordidness, glamour dimmed with shade, had passed, on small, tall heels, in a little nagging puff of perfume.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Jenny Montgomery conducted a speakeasy. *De luxe.*

It was on Riverside Drive. The building was high and square, made of buff-colored stone; an apartment building, like another. Couples with children dwelt in it, and stiff gray spinsters dwelt in it, and a man named Wilkins who solicited funds for the cause of Prohibition dwelt in it—happily unaware that in the bungalow on the roof, Jenny Montgomery served champagne, or whiskey, or absinthe, or what-can-you-pay-for, nightly including Sundays, from seven or eight o'clock on.

A private elevator shot express to her door, propelled by a uniformed youth with a thin tight mouth and a savings account. Jenny Montgomery called the bungalow "Top o' the World." She had had cards engraved (not printed):

TOP O' THE WORLD

—Riverside Drive

and you had to present one to Wallace, the sepia houseman, who answered your ring. If your card bore Jenny Montgomery's round, rather schoolgirl signature, you got in directly. If it didn't there was delay. But you got in.

From the roof that ran around the bungalow like a brick lawn, you could see the River, and the toy boats on the River, and miles and miles and miles of the cluttered town; and at night there were stars below you, brighter than higher stars, and the wheels and spires of Palisades Park made gilt geometrics on the sky. It was glorious in summer. Jenny Montgomery provided hammocks and wicker tables and chairs. Drinks were brought to you there. Graphophone music drifted soft through the open French doors, and nearby, but not too near, people you didn't know and never would know laughed, and whispered and were silent, in the gloom.

The bungalow itself had seven rooms, three baths. It was beautiful, exotic, shadowy, with purple curtains. Even in the daytime the lamps were lit, the curtains drawn across the doors and windows—that there might be no daytime, ever. Three silken bedrooms. Two connecting living rooms, spacious and dim, filled with deep divans and plump feather chairs and a scattering of tables that bore, beneath their polish, the rings of generations of wet glasses. The smaller living room had been designed a dining room, but was never used as such. One did not eat here. In the closet, built for linens, poker chips and cards were kept, and a

baby roulette wheel, and enormous dice and little dice, and folding tables.

The larger living room had an open fireplace, with the deepest velvet divan stretched before it. A grand piano stood in one corner, spread with a mandarin's robe, and the graphophone hid in a high carved case in another. There were cushions, huge and vivid. There were numerous copper ashtrays. There were seven-branch wrought-iron candlesticks, tall as a man. The whole effect was theatrical rather than home-like. Books were missing. Pictures, too, were missing. In a portfolio in a locked drawer there were photographs of pretty little girls, known to Mrs. Montgomery. But these were only shown upon occasion.

Sometimes, Saturdays and Sundays, a pianist was there; a pale blond dinner-coated boy, with magic rhythmic fingers. He played by ear. Played anything you hummed or whistled to him. Left to himself, he chose the *Rhapsody in Blue,* Whiteman's arrangement of the *Song of India*—things like that, that break your heart.

His name was Georgie.

Sometimes he was asked to play *The Varsity Drag,* or *Doin' the New Lowdown.* And a girl would dance alone, her bobbed hair prancing, her silver slippers stamping down the beat. Sometimes a man would lean in the curve of the piano, casually, his elbow backward on it and a tall glass in his hand, and sing a ballad or a mammy song. These performers were always professional; you could depend on that. Jenny Mont-

gomery tactfully discouraged the occasional amateur, emboldened by wine, who wished to give impromptu exhibition.

She was a tactful woman. She knew everything, told nothing. Her guests enjoyed an anonymity as complete as possible. "Who's who," she said, "is nobody's business." If you asked her whether or not the mustachioed dark man in the corner, absorbed in converse with the girl with dimples, was So-and-So, she smiled: "Why don't you ask him?"

If you attempted to learn from her anything about herself, she merely smiled.

A mysterious woman. The establishment she ran had mystery; an atmosphere close-mouthed, inscrutable. The servants, Wallace and Eulie, never spoke at all, except to say "The same?" or "You may settle with Madame when you are leaving, if you please."

People came and went. Sometimes but two or three would be there. Again, all the chairs that were scattered about the room in intimate tête-è-tête formation would have murmuring, oblivious occupants. Never more than twenty guests were present at a time. Evening clothes were usual. Discretion, a measure of decorum, were expected of everyone. Those moved to shout and throw things must go elsewhere.

Once in a while—quite often—even habitués of the place would be denied admittance at the door. "Madame is very sorry. Not tonight. Reserved for a private party." These were the nights when the speakeasy must have another name; a name to whisper.

These were the occasions beginning with the taking of the photograph portfolio from the drawer.

Last year Jenny Montgomery had made, over and above her considerable running expenses, thirty-two thousand nine hundred and fifty dollars.

She lived at night. Mornings did not exist for her, and lunch was just a word. She woke in mid-afternoon, to three hours or less of daylight and of privacy. They were busy hours, always; moving on schedule. Coffee in bed, then telephone calls, then conferences with Wallace and with Eulie. Ten minutes at her checkbook, sixty in her dressing-room. On Mondays and Thursdays Eulie, who had once worked in a beauty parlor, marcelled her mistress's hair. On other days at the same time the tiny wrinkles were massaged, the brows were plucked, the elongated Chinese nails were manicured, and painted red.

By about four-thirty Mrs. Montgomery was ready to go out.

She always went out, rain or shine. Wallace and Eulie never knew where, exactly. "Out" was all she told them. Sometimes purchases were delivered from shops the following morning. A sleeveless slinky gown of purple or of gold, to match her background. A pair of metal sandals, size 3B. A Paris hat. A huge new lemon-squeezer such as soda fountains have. Four dozen gold-lipped highball glasses.

Oftener, however, nothing tangible came of these trips, and it was thought by Wallace and Eulie, if

they thought on the subject at all, that Madame took walks for exercise. This was correct as far as it went. That the walks had deeper motive, one unvarying destination, nobody who knew her ever dreamed.

On a blustery day in early March she woke at half-past two, and lay a minute, listening to the wind. She looked not at all pretty. A ridiculous crocheted net, like a doll's pink hammock, bound her hair, and her eyes stared out from skin that was greased and gray. She wore a flannel nightgown with a high neck and long sleeves. She was old. She had known she was old when she bought that nightgown.

She lay very still, and listened. Sad wind. Sobbing wind. It beat against her small high house with savage desperation; wind lost and lonesome, striving to get in. "I like it," she thought. "I love it." It made her feel warm, secure . . . It was making her feel drowsy, she found, after a moment, so she jerked herself upright determinedly, calling, "Eulie!"

She had things to do today.

Eulie appeared, and brought a negligée and mules. Jenny Montgomery shuffled to her shower. She exchanged the pink net for a rubber bathing cap, then thrust her head around the frame of the door to say to Eulie, who was selecting lacy lingerie from wardrobe shelves, "Did you go to the bank?"

"Yes, Madame. An hour ago."

"Three hundred and eighty-some, wasn't it?"

"Three hundred eighty-four, sixty-three," said Eulie, the precise.

Mrs. Montgomery nodded in a satisfied way. "That game helped," she remarked. And withdrew her head, and turned the shower on.

Later, while being manicured, she asked more questions. She looked much younger now. Her henna hair was dressed, her face was powdered; she wore earrings, and her mouth was stenciled bright. Reclining among pillows on a lavender taffeta day-bed in a purple chiffon, fur-trimmed negligée, she was her normal gaudy self. Madame—"Monty" to the clientêle—of "Top o' the World."

She held the fingertips of one hand in a dish of soapsuds set upon a chair, and extended the other to Eulie, who bent over it, busily filing.

"Jensson call up this noon, Eulie?"

"Yes, Madame."

"You told him about the Bacardi?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Anyone else call up?"

"Miss Gertrude called, just a little while ago."

"Miss—oh. She's a pest," said Mrs. Montgomery, frowning slightly. "What's she keep calling for? I've got her phone number."

"I told her that," said Eulie.

There was a silence then, broken only by the wind and by the tiny scratch of Eulie's file.

"Who was the tall man with the scar last night?" Mrs. Montgomery queried next.

"His name was Smith, I think," Eulie said gravely.

Her mistress smiled a small and weary smile.

"He had a card," Eulie added. "Signed."

"I never saw him before."

After a thoughtful moment, Mrs. Montgomery spoke again. "We ought to be more careful," she said.

She always said that.

This day she was hatted and furred for the street as early as quarter of four. "Back by six," she told Eulie . . . Going down in the elevator, she hummed a little tune. She was happy. "Surely today!" sang her heart. "Today there will be one!"

The eyes that from the elevator mirror returned her gaze were soft and shining in their black-starred frames.

On the sidewalk, she hailed a taxicab. It was too windy and too cold to walk. She gave an address fifteen blocks away, and up a side-street. "Hurry," she urged. "I've got to be there in two minutes." Which was not true, at all.

She had the right change ready when the cab stopped, with a quarter for the tip. She ran across the pavement, up the steps. They were brownstone steps, with a glass door at the top that swung into a tiny vestibule. As she ascended fleetly, her lifted eager eyes looked through the glass to the double row of mail-boxes—*Yes!* The second left-hand slit showed white. It would be dark, opaque, if there was nothing.

She knew. It had been dark often enough.

With a key in fingers not quite steady she unlocked the box, and took the letter out. A letter postmarked Canada. Addressed to "Mrs. Jenny Miller."

That name, too, was on the box.

"*Long* one!" Jenny Montgomery sighed ecstatically, pinching.

She locked the box again, and found another, larger key, with which she let herself into the house. Inside there was a small hall, with carpeted stairs climbing from it. Jenny Montgomery mounted the stairs. She mounted four flights of them, slapping her letter lightly against the banister all the way.

The door at the top of the fourth flight opened to her key direct into a living room so colorful, so sunny, that it was mental tonic just to enter. A living room all yellow walls and deeper yellow woodwork, and tiny gay canaries perching in the cretonne curtains, here and there, amid the green-blue-orange-black design. A small room crowded cheerfully with painted furniture, and fat low chairs slip-covered in bright linens in plain hues. A room, you felt quite sure, where smiling people lived, and wore their bedroom slippers if they wanted to, and sometimes in the evenings said, "Oh, listen, this is good!" and read a chosen paragraph out loud.

Jenny Montgomery shut the door behind her. Her swift proprietary glance swept everything. Her eyelids blinked once in satisfaction, like a cat's. She crossed to a painted table on which there were novels between bookends, an empty bowl for flowers, a stack of magazines (of last September). She laid her handbag and the letter on this table and removed her gloves. She had begun to hum again, under her breath.

It was warm in the room. Beautifully warm. A radia-

tor sizzled somewhere. Nice to know that it made that sound when she was not here; keeping the place alive, though it was empty . . . This Jenny Montgomery thought absently, eying her letter. Tugging at her glove fingers, humming, and eying her letter.

She threw her coat off. With thumb and forefinger she dragged her small smart hat off by its brim, and tossed it, with the coat, upon a couch. She ruffled her hair with both hands, ran all her slim spread fingers through and through it. Eulie would have been appalled. "Your wave, Madame?" Umm—but the *comfort!* Heavenly.

She sat down with her letter. Her eyes were excited, glistening. An unsuspected dimple kept appearing and then vanishing beside the violent pigment of her mouth. The touseled bob, the dimple, gave her youth, all of a sudden; she seemed a girl, made up to mimic forty.

Her fingers stripped a side edge of the envelope. She drew the pages out, unfolded them. A snapshot fell to her lap——

A slender, handsome boy, dark-eyed. A boy about sixteen. In corduroy knickers, a sweater marked E, a little knitted cap worn jauntily, one ear exposed, he stood at ease on skates upon a spreading sheet of ice, a hockey-stick held horizontally across his thighs. He looked like an advertisement for a winter resort. He looked like an illustration from the catalogue of a Northern preparatory school. He looked—in the set of his eyes, in the shape of his face—like Jenny Montgomery. Strikingly, and unmistakably.

Sitting quite still, she gazed long at the snapshot. Once she made a strange small sound in her throat, half whimper, half croon. Once she laughed outright, tenderly. "Getting so *tall*—I can't——"

When she put it aside, propping it up on the table at her elbow, her eyes went with it, reluctant to drop away. She nodded her head to the tiny pictured figure. "Was a *good* hockey player!" she assured it solemnly, in baby-talk. "Was the great big *captain of the team!*"

Eulie and Wallace would have thought that Madame had gone suddenly mad. Or that they had.

She took up the pages. Snuggled her shoulders deep in the upholstery of her chair. Propped her elbows on the arms, and tilted her head . . . The letter began, "Dearest," and it was five inky pages long. "I guess you think I have died or something, but the fact is I have been so busy," etc. A page of that. A paragraph of thanks for "the check, also the cake. It got a little mashed coming but tasted great." Another paragraph, much underlined, about "the food they give us," which, it appeared, was "fierce." As addenda to this, scrawled on the margin, "How about some fudge next time and maybe a roast chicken?"

Then there were two pages of hockey, and a page-long complaint of one "Itchy" Flanders, the Latin instructor, who had "sprung a quiz" in a most unsporting way on the Monday previous. Then this:

"Vacation starts March 24th and we get 10 days. Bill Hardhart asked me to go home with him—he lives

in Montreal—but I would rather come down and be with you if it's okay. Remember you said maybe I could for spring vacation, since I didn't Christmas? I haven't seen you for so long and I'd like to take in some shows and get a couple of new suits made including a new dinner coat as this one is getting too short in the sleeves. So will you let me know in your next letter so I can tell Bill yes or no and make arrangements. Have to stop now as I am writing in study hall and it is time for the bell.

Love,

ROGER.

P.S. Let me know as soon as you can about vacation as there are only 17 days more. R.

Jenny Montgomery read the whole letter four times over. Then she folded it, and sat slipping it through her fingers, thoughtfully. There was a little line between her brows. But her eyes shone. She was deciding whether or not to let him come—knowing all the time, full well, that he was coming.

They had not been together, she and Roger, since September. Before that, not since February. Before that . . .

"Twice a year," she said slowly, out loud. "Two weeks—out of fifty-two." Her voice caught, and she closed her eyes. It sounded like so little, to be all the joy she had.

But he was coming! Soon! That was the thing to think about. Her eyes flew open, and were lit again. They roved the room. There he would read; that great

chair was his favorite. He would sleep on that couch, as he did always when he came. "I must buy a radio," thought Jenny Montgomery. "He asked for one the last time. Radio—let's see—some new victrola records —I must make a list——"

She got some paper; made a list. It was a long and very thoughtful one. There were even such triumphs of foresight among the items as "hard toothbrush" (Roger usually forgot his when he packed) and "salted almonds," because he loved them.

She went into the one bedroom that adjoined the living room, and opened the closet door. Dresses hung there, in a row. Plain dark things. Moderate. Frankly middle-aged. Clothes for Roger Miller's quiet mother. Jenny Montgomery with a jeweled red-tipped hand took them down one by one and examined them. They were scarcely worn. Yet she added to her memorandum, "Dresses, hats, coat"—lest he think it strange that she had nothing new.

She moved into the kitchen. This was of all the rooms the sunniest, with yellow checked dimity curtains, very starch and fresh, yellow oilcloth, blue linoleum. A model kitchen that seemed lifted bodily out of a department-store show-window. Over Jenny Montgomery's face at the threshold there spread a beautific expression. She sang, tying on a gingham apron, opening cupboard doors and slamming them . . .

In less than fifteen minutes she had made a pan of fudge, and set it on the window sill to cool. It was excellent fudge. She scraped the saucepan with a spoon

and devoured the scrapings hungrily. Her satin bishop sleeves were pushed high on her arms. Her hair was rumpled as a little boy's. When she trotted to the window sill, knife in hand, to cut the smooth brown softness into squares, you caught the glint of an ankle bracelet below her apron's hem. She looked grotesque, and was utterly content.

While the fudge grew hard enough to pack into a box, she gave a telegram by telephone:

"Mr.—Roger—Miller, M-i-l-l-e-r. No. M. *M*—as in *'Mother'*——"

He had been born in the summer of 1911; and if some day he is great, and his biography is written, the writer may add, "of poor but honest parents." Certainly Harry Miller and his young wife Jenny were poor. Certainly they were honest. A tired little couple with rough deft hands and minds full of little, little things, who loved one another, quarreled and forgot it, struggled grimly for existence and on Sundays thanked God, and were more wretched—and much happier—than they knew.

They had a wee shabby house that would be paid for in six years, and they breakfasted by lamplight every morning. Harry Miller, blond, huge, looked like a Viking, and was a street-car motorman. Passengers liked to ride with him on the front platform. A sign said, "Don't Talk to the Motorman." But Harry talked to you. He gossiped cheerily; he philosophized; he prophesied. He had two concurrent opinions to offer

on any given topic. One began, "The way I see it is—" The other: "My Old Lady says——"

His Old Lady was twenty-two years old; a brown-eyed, brown-haired pretty little thing. Nobody knew who her parents were. Harry Miller had married her out of the home of the Widow Peters, who in turn had procured her, to act as daughter, companion and "help," from an orphanage. Her name was Jenny Chase then—or at any rate, that was the name with which her infant wrist had been tagged when the orphanage matron found her, one long-ago night, in the vacant vestibule.

She was a good girl, and a capable girl, and Harry Miller was considered lucky. She cooked well, sewed beautifully, scrubbed endlessly, and was faithful to him, even with her eyes. A man could not ask more. This man didn't. He worshiped her, in his inarticulate plain man's way.

In the first year of their marriage she bore him a child that died. In the third year, Roger was born. Roger Harold Miller, eight and three-quarters pounds. Harold for his father. Roger—well, his mother didn't know why, quite. She only knew that 'Roger Miller' had a sound that pleased her. She used to try it over variously to herself. "Roger Miller, the financier." "Dr. Roger Miller." "An exhibition of paintings by Roger Miller." "Mr. and Mrs. Somebody Grand request the honor of Mr. Roger Miller's company" . . .

At the Widow Peters', before she was so busy, she had read every book she could lay hands on.

Roger was a merry baby, plump, with blue eyes turning brown, and pink petal hands amazing strong. "Look, Harry! How he grabs hold!" Harry said he was going to run a street-car like his dad. But he wasn't. Jenny Miller knew he wasn't.

Before he was six weeks old she had a secret china bank, called in her mind "For Roger Later." There was a quarter in it, at the start. Then thirty cents. Then thirty-three. Then forty-three. "By the time he's grown up—" Jenny Miller thought. Breathlessly. Schemingly.

Economy had always been a necessity with her. Now it became an obsession. She retrimmed her two hats, for the second time each, and stirred fewer eggs than usual into the angel food cake for the Baptist Church Christmas supper. Out of old wash dresses and petticoats, she manufactured Roger's little clothes. "Don't you care, now," she would croon to him, putting them on. "Some day you'll be the best-dressed boy that ever *was!* So don't you care."

She faded a little that year, and was not so pretty nor so young. The small uncertain mirror above the bureau in the bedroom told her this, and once or twice she sighed. She was a woman. But she was maternal even more, and Roger's pink increasing pounds, the china bank that shook so noisily, were compensation. After all, what had her prettiness ever got her? Harry, of course, but—she had him now.

Then one day, a June day, warm and fragrant (she remembered it still: the sunshine, and the song of a

bird in the yard) footsteps came speeding to her door, knuckles rapped frantically, a voice cried "Mrs. Miller! Mrs. Miller! Mrs. Miller!——"

And she had only Roger, in the world.

Then there was no more angel food cake. There were no new heartening "*klink!*s" into the little china bank. There was not even a shabby house, but a single cluttered room, with a crib in the corner and milk bottles on the sill. Jenny Miller sewed. She made dresses, aprons, anything anyone wanted. It was not very profitable. Orders, after the first gust of sympathy for her had subsided, were few. But she tried. For months.

She had that to remember always, afterward. She did try.

The Widow Peters, who might have helped so much, had died the winter before. The other villagers were poor and did their own sewing, or they were rich and had it done in cities. Jenny Miller didn't blame them. She didn't blame any of them. But she learned, that year, the terrible casual carelessness of people—never to forget it; never again to expect, nor to give, any quarter.

Her days were alike. The world was four walls and a window. Seconds were stitches, and hours were seams, and Success was a little cup of beef juice, warm and thick and undiluted, for the baby. Or a new pink all-wool blanket, for the baby. Or a rattle. Or a teething-ring.

She talked constantly to Roger, tiny as he was; apologizing, promising. "We'll get out of this. We'll

have a lovely home some day—and lots of toys for you—and a pony—" It was as though he were a little prince of the blood, whom she had brought to live in poverty. But not for long! Not for very long, she kept assuring him. *"Soon.* Something will happen soon. You'll see."

The day she had to break his china bank to buy some spinach and a saucepan and a spool of 40 thread, she cried for many minutes, holding him tight against her breast. Cried stormily. Then just cried. Then put him down and sat there for a long time, dry-eyed, staring.

One of the things she bought that day with Roger's little savings was a round gilt tin of rouge for the cheeks. One of the ways she walked was the way that led past the shoe-soles on the porch-rail of the hotel near the depot.

Sometimes in the after years, she wondered idly whether she would have walked so, if it had not been for Roger. Sometimes she thought she would have, ultimately. Sometimes she thought not. But always it seemed to her that, since there was Roger, she could have done nothing else. There were her dreams for him. Nothing else was important. And all the aprons a woman could sew in her whole life long were not enough to make dreams like those come true.

The matron of the orphanage, who had been her only mother—and a kind one—was retired now, and living in a neat green house in the next sunny village but one. To her Jenny Miller entrusted her son. "Take care of him," she said, white-faced. "Oh, you'll take

good care of him? I have to go away—to work—for a while."

The while was fifteen years.

At first she looked for a fine man who had money, who would marry her and love Roger as his own. Everywhere she went she looked for him. In cafés. In dancing places. Always her eyes strayed past and beyond her companion of the moment, looking for him.

Later, she looked for money. Simply that, and all of it she could get.

When Roger was three he had mittens of fur, and a puppy, and a silver mug for milk. When he was six he had a red automobile, and a Liberty bond in the bank. He went to kindergarten, and was kept immaculate with soap that cost thirty cents a cake. His guardian, Mrs. Willoughby, boasted to the neighbors of his mother's phenomenal success as a dressmaker in New York City. "You know she has a shop now. Yes, all her own. Well, I always knew she was smart!"

Once a friend of Mrs. Willoughby's on a trip to New York tried to find the shop, and failed. This was duly reported, via Mrs. Willoughby, to Jenny Miller, who wrote at once of new triumphs. She had given up the shop. She was designing now, for a wholesale house in the Thirties, at a salary "that is really big, and will increase, I think."

Apparently it did. Roger, ten years old, was sent to a boarding school; the most expensive, the most exclusive. In the summer he was sent to a private camp. He grew. He acquired muscles, a handsome tan, a smat-

tering of learning, a circle of polished young friends with tailored clothes and English accents and allowances that were large, but not larger than his. He became what adults fondly call "a little gentleman." He shot up, and the adjective had to be left out. But the noun remained.

His mother was proud, proud. The very fleeting thought of him could inflate her heart like a sudden wind blown in. This she had created (no matter how); this perfection; this young elegance. She was proud of his weekends at great estates, of his easy use of grand and glittering names. On the rare occasions when, dark-clad and chary of speech, she visited him at school, she was proud of his patent popularity. As time went on she sensed a certain fastidiousness in him, a sensitive, exquisite delicacy of taste. He was a snob; and she was insanely proud of that.

Somehow it seemed to balance things a little.

March 16th.

Dear Mother:

Just a line as I am writing in French class and may be called on at any moment. I had your wire, and the fudge, which was marvelous. I am looking forward to the 26th, which is the day I arrive. Vacation starts the 24th as I told you, but I have to stay over here an extra day on account of this play I'm supposed to be in, and will leave on the 25th, getting there on the 26th, Sunday. Don't try to meet me as I don't know quite which train. I'll come straight to the apartment when I get in. I certainly am wild to see you and have a

thousand things to tell you and ask you. What would you think about my going to Europe for the coming summer with Randy Britton, he's the English prof, and a bunch of the fellows? I've never been, as you know, and it's high time. Think it over, and we'll talk about it when I get there.

Hastily,

R.

He was coming tomorrow. Tomorrow! Not two weeks from now, nor a few days from now, but just over night from now! It was a song in the mind of Jenny Miller, alias Montgomery. It was a warmth in her heart. All afternoon and through the dinner hour she had toiled at the little apartment on the side-street, getting it in readiness. Making it look lived-in. Winding clocks, putting flowers and new magazines around. Baking a chocolate cake, a lemon pie, a loaf of nut-bread—for *tomorrow!*

She had not wanted to return here to the roof bungalow. It spoiled joyous anticipation just a little, to return. But tonight there was to be a Private Party—Nigel Williams'; she must be here, for a few hours anyway. It was ten o'clock now. Williams had said, "We'll get there around ten." Jenny Miller, with Eulie's aid, dressed fast.

She was business-like. After tonight, the place would have to get along without her. She would not come near it, nor remember it, while Roger stayed. She would tell him that the firm had given her ten days off, and she would be happy . . . happy. . . .

But now she was business-like, she must think of things.

She said to Eulie, "Did you phone those two, as I told you?"

Eulie nodded. "Miss Gertrude and Miss Bobbie."

"They're coming?"

Eulie nodded again. "They'll be here at ten-fifteen."

"The champagne?"

"It's on ice."

There were several more questions, several more answers.

"Good," said Jenny Miller then.

She was almost dressed when the doorbell rang. "Purple velvet," she commanded Eulie. "The one with the feathers on the hip.

"Here," she added, "give it to me. You go on out. Tell him everything's arranged, and I'll be there in just a minute."

Eulie left the room. Jenny Miller made of the purple dress a cipher of folds, and slipped it over her shoulders and pulled it down. It was skin-tight and knee-high, with a tiny tagging train. Against the background of the train her legs were golden chiffon, tapering prettily to gold shoes like miniature boats with their sterns set on high gilt poles.

She donned jewelry next. A pair of long gold earrings. Two antique gold bracelets, tight and wide as handcuffs. She took her time. From her dressing room, through doors ajar, she could hear voices: Williams' voice; Eulie's voice, obsequious and low. There was the

hiss of seltzer water into a glass, then into a second glass. Someone started the phonograph:

"My one an' onnn-ly,
"Wha'm I gonna do if you turrr-n me down. . . ."

Jenny Miller hummed with it. *"Hmm-hmm-hmm-hmmmmm-mm. . . ."*

Eulie reappeared.

"Is the other man out there too?" her mistress queried. "Williams' friend?"

"Yes, he's there."

"I didn't hear him."

"He's looking at the photographs," Eulie said.

"I'd be so lone-ly. . . ."

Jenny Miller hummed again.

"Here," she broke off to say. "Hook this shoulder thing."

She strolled forth a minute later, gaudy, spectacular; one hand on the hip where the feathers quivered, the other fingering a long jade cigarette holder. . . . In the living room Williams stood with his back to her, beside a divan. He was a blond young man, rather pudgy and short, with absurd baby dimples when he smiled. A rich man's son. Jenny Miller knew him well.

His companion, seated on the divan, was partially hidden from her by Williams, who bent over him. She could see long legs in sharp-creased black trousers and knees upon which was balanced the photograph port-

folio, open wide. As she approached, one of the stranger's hands held out one of the photographs at arm's length. She noted, feeling vaguely reminded of something, that the sleeve of his dinner coat was short, showing an extra inch or so of wrist.

She said, above the music, "Good evening, gentlemen!"

Williams straightened and wheeled, crying boisterously, "Hul-*lo,* Monty! How's the girl?" He put his arm around her shoulders, squeezed them in a friendly way, and impelled her suddenly rigid body forward a step or two.

"Here," he said, "shake hands with a friend of mine. Mr. Miller. From Canada. Rog, this is the famous Mrs. Montgomery—otherwise Monty——"

He stopped speaking. The phonograph with a crashed discordant chord stopped playing; and after that it was quiet, weirdly quiet, in the room.

Jenny Miller stared at her son.

From the divan—he had not risen—Roger stared back. His eyes were wide, incredulous, horrified; *fearful.* Fearful above all else. "He thinks," thought Jenny Miller, "I will give him away." With a small still piece of her whirling, screaming mind, she thought this.

She shook her head, ever so slightly.

"How do you do," she said, "Mr.—Miller." And she made her mouth smile.

Above the smile, her eyes spoke anguished-clear, as his had spoken. *"Act!"* they besought him. "Help me."

"I'm very glad to know you," she said.

Williams had turned to the table on which bottles and glasses stood. "Straight, Monty?" he asked.

If he had for an instant sensed anything amiss, her manner had quite reassured him. "Or will you wait," he added, "and have champagne?"

She shook her head. "The Scotch. Please. Straight, yes."

She needed it.

"Just a little," she said, for Roger.

She sat down on the divan beside him, striving not to let herself notice how, instinctively, almost imperceptibly, he edged away. She thought, "What shall I say? What would I say if he were—*any*body?" Her brain fumbled for words, light words and casual. "You—you're from Canada?" she said, not looking at him.

That was safe. Williams had mentioned that.

It was Williams who answered her. "Yeah, Canada," he nodded, pouring whiskey. "I met him when I was up there at Christmas time. We made plenty whoopee together, too—eh, Rog?" Carrying the little glass of brown liquid, he approached the divan. "By the way!" he chuckled. "He's on a train coming down from Canada right this minute, if you did but know it! Here you are, Monty."

She took the glass. Her fingers carefully steady.

"How do you mean?" she lightly said.

"Well, you see," explained Williams, grinning at Roger, "his mother lives here in New York, and he's

going to spend his spring vacation with her. You know how *that* is, of course! No chance for any excitement, or anything. So he told her he couldn't get here till tomorrow, and wired me to meet him at five today. He's got this one night to celebrate—then he has to be Momma's little cherub for the rest of the vacation. Eh, Rog?"

Roger beside her made an unintelligible sound in his throat.

"Speak up!" commanded Williams, hugely amused. "What's the matter—cat got your tongue?" He winked at Jenny Miller, roguishly. "Boy's a bit shy," he informed her, "just at first. The Big Town has got him a little gaga. He's young, you see. Oh, and *how!*——"

Williams gave a sudden reminiscent bark of laughter. "Can you imagine this?" he demanded gleefully of his hostess, pointing at Roger. "I was telling him about you, and I said, 'She runs a house of call," and he said, 'A *what?*——"

Jenny Miller had swallowed her drink, in one swallow.

"So you—explained," she said tonelessly.

Williams, still chortling, said something about "words of one syllable——"

The doorbell rang.

"No!" cried Jenny Miller, suddenly, shrilly.

She got to her feet. "Wallace! Wallace!"

She stood burning-eyed, facing the kitchen door, the fingers of her two hands locking and unlocking before her. "Don't let them in!" she said when the servant

appeared. "Do you understand, Wallace? Tell them to go away—and *stay away*——"

She turned. She could feel how pale she was; pale as death. She moistened her lips. "You heard me," she addressed Williams. "It's all off.

"You'd better go," she added faintly.

"What the——" Williams, bewildered. "What's wrong, Monty?"

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing. I—'ve changed my mind, that's all."

Abruptly her voice soared, vehement, loud. "It's *all* wrong! And I'm *through* with it! I'm giving up this place—this business—I always hated it, hated everything connected with it——"

She was looking at Williams; pleading with Roger. Groveling, mentally, at Roger's feet. "I mean it," she said pitifully. "Never any more. Never. I swear it. I'll scrub floors first, I'll——"

It was useless. Her eyes flicked Roger's face once and saw that it was useless, and the swift words stopped in a thin small whimper of pain. "Oh," she cried out, "don't you *understand?* It was only so I could gi——"

She checked herself. Shook her head, choking. Turned blindly away.

In the corridor outside, the elevator door clanged shut. She could somehow feel the car, going down and down. . . .

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Williams, into the silence.

She scarcely heard him. All her mind, all her faculties, were concentrated on the blurred shape a little distance off that was a chair, if she could reach it, if she could only—— There.

Williams was talking on. Demanding testily what had struck her. From the chair, through the hot moist haze in her eyes, she glared at him, loathing him. This was his fault. He had come, and brought Roger, and now, because he was here, she couldn't speak, she couldn't defend herself, she had no *chance*——

"Get out," she heard herself say to him. "Get out of here. Get out."

Even after she had ceased saying it, it repeated itself again and again in her mind. "Get out. Get out!" It was all she could think. Dimly she knew that Williams stood up; vaguely, without caring, she heard the word he threw at her. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered at all except his going. "Get out. Hurry. Leave us alone."

Then she saw that Roger was going too. Rising from the divan, moving toward the foyer, following Williams—going.

"Wait!" she called sharply.

Both young men halted in the foyer door. Turned inquiringly. Roger's face, stranger's face, white and set, leaped at her.

She was out of her chair now. Standing erect. Newly, desperately calm.

"Mr. Miller," she said, "will not leave."

It was horrible, it was not to be borne, that grim young face of her son . . .

"I—I'm sorry," he said, low.

And he went.

For seconds the echo of the slammed front door filled all her consciousness, crowding out thought. Then she shrieked, *"Eulie!"*

The maid came running. Jenny Miller seized her by the shoulders, pushed her toward the door. "Quick!—the other young man, the new one—make him come back—tell him he must, I *must* see him! Tell him I'm ill——"

The door slammed again. The echo subsided, and there was stillness. Centuries of stillness.

Jenny Miller waited. Listened. Died a little.

She heard at last the sound of the elevator, stopping again. The door of it opening—and again shutting.

Then Eulie returned. Alone. "He's gone, Madame. He wouldn't listen at all."

The house telephone was on the wall of the kitchen. Jenny Miller reached it in four seconds. "God," she prayed, "make them answer—make them hurry——" Until the doorman's slow "Hello" crept up sixteen stories to her ear.

She spoke rapidly, concisely. "John, this is Mrs. Montgomery. Listen: a young man in a raccoon coat is on his way down now in my elevator, with another—*'Just stopping now?'* " She took a quick deep breath. "Tell him—the younger man—he has left some money in my apartment. A check for twenty thousand dollars, made out in his name, tell him. *Twen-ty thou-sand.* Yes, that's right. I'm holding it for him. Hurry!"

She hooked up the receiver. She walked out into the living room and sat in a chair, and waited again.

She thought, "It'll take a minute or two. He'll have to tell Williams something or other. And the elevator —slow—he couldn't possibly get here yet——"

She thought, "I might have made it twenty-two thousand. That's what the last balance was. Twenty-two thousand, four hundred and— He'll come. Don't worry. He'll come. It's a lot of money. He wants to go to Europe, and he wants a special-built car——"

Her fingers pulled and shredded a little handkerchief. Her red mouth trembled, and she bit at it.

In a minute. In just a minute now. Don't worry—yet——

"I'll count to a hundred," she thought childishly. "Then he'll be here."

She counted as far as nine; forgot to count further. "Maybe," she thought, "something's wrong with the elevator——"

Minutes. More minutes. How long had it been? Long enough, surely. Too long.

"Oh, God!" she moaned aloud.

Her ears strained for a sound. There was no sound. She got up difficultly, and went to the outer door, and looked into the corridor. No sound. Nothing.

"Maybe the doorman didn't catch him——"

She telephoned down again. The doorman's voice sounded dazed. "I told him, all right," he said. "I told him just what you told me—but he said it wasn't his, and he went on out."

She left the receiver hanging by its cord. She walked like a sleep-walker through the rooms, into her bedroom. She shut the door and locked it and lay down on her bed. She thought, "He is gone. He is gone. He is gone. He is gone."

She did not cry. There were no tears for this.

"He is gone. I have lost him. I shall—never—see him—again."

Her life was over, then. Oh, she would go on living, she would eat, and sleep, and move about the world; but her life was over. Roger was gone, and she could not bring him back, nor bribe him back. *Nor bribe him back.*

She thought about that . . .

Hours she lay there, thinking, staring. Until she was very old and very wise. Until she knew at last that, though her heart bled dry, she could be glad, she could say to herself, "Well done."

EYE-OPENER

EYE-OPENER

LAST night's lipstick was still on the mouth of young Mrs. Avery Brett when she woke, and last night's cocktails were torture inside her temples. She had fought against waking. Now that the fight was lost, she lay as motionless as before, with closed eyes. She wondered what time it was, but she did not wonder much, and to look and see would certainly not be worth while. The time didn't matter. Nothing at all mattered at all on a morning like this. Except possibly ice-water. . . .

"Avery?"

"Mm."

"Get me some water?"

Young Mr. Brett emitted a moan. "Somebody get *me* some!"

After an interval he stirred in his bed, and sat up. And swore expertly. "Head," he added in explanation. "Help! How many did I *have?*"

Ann Brett did not answer. She did not know. She did not know how many she herself had had; but she knew it must have been a great many. She lifted her lashes heavily and gazed down the length of the satin puff that covered her. There beyond the foot of it, noon was blazing in, between taffeta curtains that

e, she perceived, the wrong green. Quite the wrong green.

"What I want to know is," Avery was saying, "what was it all *about?* Do you remember?"

His wife had thrown a white bare arm across her eyes. Below it her painted mouth curled a little, like a poppy petal withering. "Nothing," she said wearily. "It's never about anything. Is it? We just—do it."

"Mm," said Avery. "We—and several million other people."

"That doesn't justify us."

"No, I suppose not."

They were silent a moment. And the little clock on the table between their beds was very loud.

"Well——" said Avery. As one changing the subject. He swung his feet to the floor and with them groped for slippers, while his arms sought, backward, the sleeves of a dressing gown. He rose, shrugging it on, knotting the cord. A large young man. Broad of shoulder, and personable, with brown curly hair.

"I'll get you that water, shall I?"

"Please. With ice."

She lay still when he went, but her grim mind followed him through the rooms beyond. She knew so well how they looked this morning. The studio, littered with ashes and glasses and half-eaten sandwiches, with White Rock bottles, and phonograph records, and cards. . . . Who had won that last double-rubber, anyway? . . . And in the kitchen more glasses were standing, dozens, with cigarettes drowned in their

dregs; and the sink would be full of orange pulp, and lemon skins, and forks, and the shells of all the countless eggs Bill Cleeve had taxied forth to buy, for scrambling, at three A.M. . . .

"Let me *die!*" thought Ann Brett.

She pulled herself upright and sat in bed with her arms crossed on her propped knees. Soon she sneezed violently; and this reminded her that the room was cold, its windows all wide open. In mules with clattering satin heels and a peach-colored velvet robe, she went about closing them. And when it was done she sat down before her dressing table mirror and stared at herself. At her mouth. At her skin. At her eyes. Especially the eyes.

She was still intent upon them when Avery entered, bearing water in a tall amber glass. "I had to *wash* one!" he announced indignantly. "And there's not a particle of ice in the place! Where's that idiot maid?"

"She left," said Ann. "Don't you remember?"

"When?"

"Last night. In the midst of things. Corralled me in the hall and said she was leaving. I told you, at the time."

"Leaving why?"

"Why do they all? Sooner or later."

She still stared at herself, her chin on her hands; and though Avery had set the glass down at her elbow, she made no move to take it. "Fools," she said softly. Caught her breath. "Oh, Avery, we're such *fools!*" She shook her mussed dark head, and tilted her face

so her fingers hid it. "I sound 'morning after,' and probably that's all it is—but oh, *why* do we do it? Night after night. What does it *get* us?"

Avery looked uncomfortable. He sat on the edge of his bed, regarding his outstretched slippers. Scowling slightly. "Nothing, of course," he said.

"Then why don't we *quit* it?"

Avery's big shoulders lifted; and fell.

"We're 'good scouts,'" he said somewhat bitterly, after a while. "Professional good scouts. Every son-of-a-gun who wants a party heads for this place like—like a homing bird."

"I know," sighed Ann.

She took her hands from her face; dropped them inert, on the cool plate glass. "And look what it's doing to us."

"We're all right," Avery said. But without conviction.

Ann's tired voice went on. "We had everything. Youth, and brains, and ambition, and talent—— We thought we were going to be world-beaters, didn't we? Remember when we were married, all the—castles in Spain? And look at us. Look at your work. You used to paint for the joy of it, and everybody thought you showed the most marvelous promise. Now you paint when you have to, to pay the butcher. Or the bootlegger. You paint a girl for a soap ad, or a little boy brushing his teeth with Whosis's toothpaste—you, who could do *any*thing!—and then you sit back, satisfied—till we're broke again."

The room was quite still.

"And me," Ann continued, by and by. "I never play any more. I only bang ragtime. I haven't practiced—since I can remember. Every day I say, 'Tomorrow I will,' and then when tomorrow comes I'm tired, or there's a crowd, or I have a hang-over——"

In the mirror her face was drawn, and her eyes were big and dark, haunted with the ghosts of dreams. "And once—I used to think I'd—*be* somebody." She made a little hopeless, helpless gesture with her hands. "Like you."

The scowl between Avery's brows was definite now. He did not stir or speak.

"And I'm losing my looks," Ann said starkly, after a pause.

That roused him. His head jerked up. "Don't be silly!"

"But it's true. I look—thirty, already. And I'm not quite twenty-five. Oh," she cried out in sudden panic, "Avery, let's *do* something about it! Let's——"

She had almost said, "—go on the wagon;" but she checked the words. They were familiar words, and threadbare; a sorry family joke. "Let's *really* do something," she substituted.

"I'm willing," said Avery, low.

She turned in her chair to scrutinize him, and saw that he was in earnest, thoroughly in earnest now, as she was. His eyes were fixed, alight, and the line of his chin was hard. She had forgotten he could look like that.

"You're right," he said. "You're perfectly right! We're—throwing ourselves away. And for *what?* For a bunch of crazy fair-weather friends that don't mean a damn thing. People that if we *never* saw again it would be too soon. I tell you, Ann——" He was telling her now, in rather a scolding voice, "—it's not worth it! And it's very damn near high time we cut it out!"

"That's what I think," said Ann.

"Well, *let's,* then!"

Ann nodded.

"We mean it," she said, "this time. Don't we? Oh, Avery, I'm so glad!"

They discussed it at length, sitting side by side on the edge of Avery's bed. They had had their last drink. From this moment on, neither was to touch a drop—for a year at least. They would notify all their friends. "And we won't even serve anything," said Ann, "when they come. Think of the money we'll save!"

Gravely they took up the question of light wines and beers; and they voted no. "We might as well make it a teetotal job," Avery said. One of them mentioned New Year's Eve, which was imminent, and they decided to spend it with Avery's Methodist mother in Upper Montclair. They grew, as these plans matured, exceedingly pleased with themselves. And a little smug. They wondered how much longer it was going to take certain other young couples they knew to come to their senses. . . .

"And we'll *work!*" Avery said.

He thought about it. "Today," he declared, "I'm going to finish up that face-powder picture. All it needs is a few touches, then it'll be done. Tonight we'll get a good sleep—and tomorrow I'll call in a model, and start a cover. I've got an idea that's sure-fire. I was thinking about it the other day. A girl—— Wait."

He seized a pen and an envelope from the top of his chiffonier and, against his knee, drew hasty lines. "Like this—sport outfit—hands here—golf stick coming up like this—see? Good, isn't it?"

"Great!"

They admired the sketch, heads together. Then Avery threw it aside. "Lord," he said, "the *time* I've wasted!——

"There's plenty left, darling," said Ann.

Their enthusiasm carried them briskly through the business of dressing. They felt almost, if not altogether, well. Avery sang in the shower. Ann found that when her face was washed, cold-creamed and decorated, she was really young and lovely after all. "Why can't *I* be your model?" she called to Avery, and Avery shouted back, "You've got a job of your own!" And it was all quite gay and high of heart, with the sunshine like a gold gauze in the room.

But the sight of the studio let them down again.

They stood in the door, surveying it sickly. "Judas!" Avery said. "Could a man work *here?*"

"If we clean it up a little——" Ann began uncertainly.

They continued to survey it.

"Who broke all those victrola records, Avery?"

"Somebody. Sam, I guess. He invented a sort of a disc-throwing game, I remember."

"Cute of him."

They still did not move.

"Coffee!" Ann exclaimed abruptly. "That's what we need. Black coffee, and lots of it."

They repaired to the kitchen, and tried not to see anything but the coffee can and the percolator. When the contents of one had been transferred to the other and water added, and the whole set on the flame, they returned to the studio to wait. There were fewer piled up plates with salad between, in the studio.

"Where's my easel gone?" Avery wanted to know.

"In that little alcove that leads to the fire door. It's been there," Ann murmured, as if to herself, "for days."

Avery lugged it in. He set it in a cleared spot near the piano and stood off, hands on hips, to study the picture it held.

"Needs more than I thought."

Ann was seated, relaxed, on a divan, with her head against its back. She said nothing. To speak was too much effort. Even to say, as she felt she should say, "No, it doesn't. It's fine," was too much effort.

"Humph!" Avery grunted.

He flung away from the easel, and began to rove the room aimlessly, his hands in his pockets. Under lazy lashes Ann watched him. But her eyes were not lazy. They were alert. There was that quart bottle. Right

there. He kept passing it. Watching him was like watching a person in search of something you'd hidden. You wanted to call out, "Warmer! Colder now. Oh, *boiling!*" . . .

When he saw it she almost said, "Ah-h." But not quite.

Avery picked up the bottle. Smiled, without humor. "Well, well. Little Eva."

He held it up by its neck toward the windows. "Some in it," he said.

"Is there?" said Ann.

"Strangely enough, it's half full."

He put it down. He went and sat on the piano bench, straddling it with long blue-serge legs. His elbow on the keyboard sounded four discordant notes, and he seemed to listen till they died away.

Then he said, "How's that coffee coming, I wonder?"

"It wouldn't be done yet," said Ann.

"Can't we hurry it up? I'll pass out, in another two minutes."

"There's no way of hurrying it that I know of."

Carefully they avoided one another's eyes, glancing at the walls, the floor. Avery cleared his throat. "Of course, what we really need——"

"Is an eye-opener. Say it."

"Well—*don't* we?"

Ann was silent.

Again Avery cleared his throat. His face was a little red. "I tell you," he said, "how I've got this thing

figured. There's no sense trying to do it all at once. If we make it too hard for ourselves at the start, we'll flop. Thing to do is taper off. Am I right? Now, a short shot apiece this morning wouldn't—"

"Avery," interrupted Ann, "what's the use of talking so much? We're going to have it anyway. We both know that. Shut up, and pour it."

"Well, but—don't think I'm renigging—"

Ann shook her head.

There was a pause. Then Avery rose, and found glasses. Two whisky glasses. They had been used, but it was of no consequence.

Standing with his back to the easel, he poured two drinks; and set the bottle down on the piano.

"Here you are."

They each held a glass.

"Well," Avery said. "Down the dark alley—— Oh, *listen,* Ann! Now don't look like *that!*"——

Ann started slightly. Her lashes fell. She lifted her glass to her lips.

"I'm not," she said. "I've—quit looking."

SEVEN BLOCKS APART

SEVEN BLOCKS APART

THEY were talking about it again. Spoiling their evening, numbing their ecstasy, that was born of the glittering lights and the glad, wild music. Madeline sighed. Why *must* they, always, everywhere they went? Why couldn't they forget it, once in a while? And just have fun.

She reached over quickly and patted Johnny's sleeve. "Let's dance, honey. Let's forget it—tonight, anyway. Listen to that music, will you please?"

She smiled. She sat erect, chin lifted, gray eyes upturned. "*Tyah*-ta! *Tyah*-ta! Tyah-da-ta!" she breathed to the beat of the jazz, and brushed a thumb across her lips in the gay jazz gesture.

Abruptly she was grave again; quiet, and a little sheepish in the face of Johnny's unrelenting gravity. Her shoulders drooped. She sat back in her chair, fingering her glass, twisting it round and round.

"But it *is* nice music, Johnny."

"Um," he answered.

"We spent all this money to come here tonight—if all we're going to do is get sorry for ourselves, we might just as well've stayed home, seems to me."

Johnny said nothing. He was sitting hunched forward, his arms folded, his dark glance fixed on the

acre of floor where the locked couples swung and swayed. She looked at him. Big, beautiful Johnny. So staunch of shoulder, so brown, so—breath-taking. So sulky now, like a spanked small boy. She could have laughed at him; and yet she couldn't have laughed. Her eyes were misty, suddenly.

"I know," she murmured. "I feel the same way. But—we're young, Johnny. We've got lots of time. Some day——"

"Yeah! *Some* day!"

His bitterness startled them both a little; they scrutinized each other briefly, hard. Then their eyes fell. Madeline fumbled her glass again, stirred with the straws the weary bits of fruit in her lemonade.

"For two years," Johnny said, "we've been saying, 'Some day.' And it's no nearer now than it was two years ago."

She scarcely heard him. She was thinking, "Oh, what *started* us, anyway? When everything was so grand." She remembered. It was that idle remark of hers about Mary Brokaw's beau, and how they were going to be married. It was that word: married. That other-peoples' word. She should have known better.

"Two—years," Johnny repeated, and his voice made it sound like æons. "And look at us." His hands were fists inside his folded arms. He unclenched them, and clenched them again. "Some day—*maybe,*" he said, low. "And maybe never."

"Johnny!" Madeline cried out.

"But it's so, isn't it? Why should we kid ours——"

Her swift hand covered his mouth. "Don't *say* such things! Of course it isn't so! 'Maybe never'—why, Johnny Sebastian, I don't know what you mean! Do you mean you think we're going to stop loving each other? Is that it?"

Johnny shook his head. "No. No, I don't think that."

"Well, then."

They were silent a moment. The forgotten music filled their ears again; the panting, haunting horns, and the strings that yearned and quivered:

"I can't give you
Anything but
Love . . . baby . . . "

Under the table Madeline's foot, an absurd toy foot with a stubby toe and a lofty heel and a buckle, tapped the time. She was not conscious of it. It was instinctive, that restless foot. Detached in spirit. She took a sip of lemonade. Pushed the glass aside. Folded her white lovely hands with the carefully tended nails on the table before her.

"It's so silly," she said, "to talk about 'never'—just because right now we're not—not getting the breaks. It won't always be this way, of course. Something will happen, something——"

She stopped short. After all, what *could* happen, except a dire and tragic something? Only unthinkable solutions were possible solutions to this problem. Something happening to Johnny's mother. Or something happening to hers.

She knew that Johnny read her mind, and that his mind read the same, and she felt ashamed, and miserable, and angry with herself and him. But there it was. There it always was. They were poor. They were a shipping clerk at thirty dollars a week and a manicurist at about twenty-seven, counting tips. And they had each a dependent mother, widowed, not very young. And there it was.

She remembered two years ago, when they newly knew each other; remembered it with wistfulness. Life was simple, then. Paths were smooth. You met a boy, and his eyes were brown and bothersome, and his hair grew down in a tiny arrow on his forehead. . . . You fell in love. Blithely. Without thinking. Without ever once looking beyond the next hour, the next breathless rendezvous.

Then you and this boy began to want to get married.

The day that Johnny and Madeline first had talked of marrying remained still in her mind as the most hideous, most racking day of her life. Some of youth had been lost that day; and some of laughter. She would never forget it. She could see now, clearer than the wheeling couples or the band or the gilded walls—clearer than any tangible and present thing—their two blanched faces, hers and Johnny's. She could hear Johnny's voice, over and over: "But my *God,* Pinky—there must be *some* way—" And her own voice, saying desperately, "Yes. But what? I've got to take care of her. I can't leave her alone—any more than you

can yours. And we can't all four of us live together. They—they don't get on. So *what?"*

She could still feel the first sick shock of their realization that there wasn't any way. Not any way at all, except to wait.

Johnny sat marking the bare wooden table-top with the prong of a fork. Dully she watched. First a scratch. Then a line. Then a little groove.

"Of course," he said, "if we had money——"

The little groove deepened. Madeline watched it, unblinking. Yes. Of course. If they had money. She thought of their spasmodic past attempts to make some, to make a lot of money, all at once. There was that dance marathon. There was that drive for subscriptions to the *Household Weekly*—that had been more profitable. Johnny had made sixty-three dollars in a month, working evenings and Saturday afternoons. But his brother in Chicago, the one with the two small children, had lost his job about that time. . . .

The little groove was very deep. It would stay there now, forever. Johnny put the fork down, and leaned back in his chair. He shoved himself low, his hands in his pockets, his chin digging his four-in-hand tie.

"Maybe," he said thoughtfully, "one of them will marry again——"

She wanted to weep then. Something inside her snapped, and she wanted to shriek and scream. "I can't *stand* it," she thought. "I can't—" It was too heart-rending. They were too pitiful, snatching where there were no straws.

She said, "Let's go home, Johnny. Please. I—don't feel like this place any more."

The music followed them out, and down the stairs, nipping at their heels. Even on the street they heard it still:

"Diamond bracelets
Woolworth doesn't
Sell . . . baby. . . ."

They began to walk rather fast, to lose it sooner.

Two blocks north. One block west. Then they were descending subway steps, watching their feet so as to avoid the bits of soggy paper, the chewing gum wrappers, the blotches of chewed tobacco. Johnny held Madeline's elbow. They did not speak. They had hardly spoken in three blocks.

The subway was dank and blurry-bright, and hollow with the strange sepulchral hollowness of subway stations late at night. The turns of the turnstile crashed, reverberated. There were not many people. A fat black woman with a rattan suitcase, an attendant wielding a listless long-handled brush, a couple on a bench, holding hands. . . . Across the tracks, on the downtown platform, a chubby little boy with dangling sandals slept beautifully in his young father's arms.

"Want to see how much you weigh?" said Johnny.

He produced change from his pocket, spread it out on his palm, selected a penny. Madeline saw how much she weighed.

Johnny was frowning when she stepped from the

machine. "Hundred and seven's not enough," he said. "You used to weigh—what? Hundred and fifteen, hundred and eighteen? Somewhere around there. Didn't you, baby?"

"I was too fat," lied Madeline.

They stood at the edge of the platform, side by side, gazing down on the gleaming cold tracks.

"I hear the subway company's going to put up rails along," Johnny remarked conversationally. "Too many people jumping off in front of trains. Raises hell with the service."

Madeline nodded. "There certainly have been a lot lately."

They stared at the tracks.

"I s'pose," Johnny said, "they do it just all of a sudden. Probably didn't mean to, beforehand. Probably just meant to go to Times Square or some place, and then—it looked so *easy*——"

They stared at the tracks.

"I read a story," Madeline said, "in a magazine, about a man who—did. Jumped. He meant to, though. He planned it all out."

She added after a pause, " 'Nickel's Worth,' it was called."

" 'Nickel's Worth,' eh?"

"Yes. You see——"

"I get it," said Johnny.

They stared at the tracks. There, far down, was the rushing red eye of the train.

Suddenly Johnny wheeled, jerking Madeline by the

arm. "Come on," he commanded in a queer, thick voice "let's buy some gum——"

Their train stopped. They boarded the nearest car hurriedly, gratefully; and sat close together on the slippery yellow seat. Their hands touched. Gripped. . . The man across the aisle had a paper with pictures of the newest pretty murderess on the back. They began feverishly to talk about the newest pretty murderess. Then they talked about the man's feet, which were monstrous for such a little man; about the bootleg-looking package that lay on the seat beside him; about the car-cards strung in a high bright row above his head and on down. . . .

By that time Madeline's color was back, and the ghost of madness had gone from Johnny's eyes, and the train was diving into their station.

They lived in the Bronx, only seven blocks apart; that is almost next door in New York. They had lived there since infancy, both of them, but they had not met until they were grown, and then they had met at Coney Island. This fact was to them an unfailing source of wonder. Neighbors for years—and they had had to go all the way down to Coney to find each other! They often spoke about it. It was, they agreed, Fate, absolutely.

Johnny's home was nearest the subway. They passed it on their loitering walk to Madeline's: a soiled brick building with a fire-escape muzzling its thin façade. They glanced at it as they passed. Madeline leaned her head back to look up. High up.

"Your mother's awake," she observed. "There's a light."

"Yeah?"

"She always waits up for you, doesn't she?"

"Yeah," said Johnny.

They quickened their pace a little after that. But not for long. A block or so, and they were sauntering again. Johnny put his arm around Madeline's waist—there being, at that hour, only one or two stray people who didn't matter, to see. Madeline pulled off her hat and swung it in her hand, and sometimes her hair was blacker than the shadows, and sometimes, when they passed lighted doorways, it was red, gleaming red with gold in it.

She lifted her face to the wind.

"Nice out," she sighed.

"You said it."

"Stars—and everything."

There was a tiny silence, and then Johnny began. "Say, I'm sorry I was so darn low tonight, Pinky."

"It's all right."

"I don't know what got into me, I swear I don't. I just—just had the darnedest feeling——" He shook his head. "I made you feel pretty bad, too, I guess. I should've kept it to myself."

"It's all right," she repeated.

But it was not all right. She knew that. He knew it. Tonight, for the first time, they had said, "Maybe never," they had let themselves admit that life might beat them after all, and waiting have no end. It was

not all right; for once you tasted hopelessness, what could quite take the taste away?

They turned into Madeline's block without speaking again.

The house was one of a row of sullen brownstone dwellings; the sixth in the row from the corner—or, more unmistakably, the one with the second-hand furniture shop in the basement. "P. Marek, Household Furnishings Bought & Sold." Madeline's flat was the fourth floor front one. (There were two on a floor.) From her windows she could look on the opposite sullen brownstones, on the children who hopscotched all day long in the street, on the comings and goings of the chairs and lamps and bedsteads of P. Marek.

The house had a vestibule, secret and dark, wherein Johnny and Madeline were wont to bid each other lingering good nights. But tonight the vestibule was occupied. When they opened the door there was a little stir, a giggle, a glimpse of anonymous faces, two faces, in the gloom. . . . "Of course," thought Madeline wearily. "Somebody *would* be there." It was part of this night, more of this night's frustration.

They shut the door again, and standing on the topmost brownstone step outside, kissed briefly.

"So long, baby," Johnny said.

"Good night, Johnny dear."

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

There seemed to be nothing further to say. After a mute, strained moment during which they tried to think

of something—something comforting, something heartening—they gave it up, and Johnny mumbled, "Well. Be good," and kissed her once again, and went away.

Mrs. Phoebe Dietz, Madeline's mother, was a vast pink woman made pinker by rouge and vaster by laces and ruffles. She was a preposterous woman. When you saw her attired for the street or for the movies (of which she was inordinately fond) you *blinked;* this simply, you felt, could not *be*. This riot of color. This billow of frills. This elephantine fluffiness. . . . Mrs. Dietz at Madeline's age had been a "baby-doll" type. It had become a habit with her, a habit which neither years nor mirrors nor weighing-machines could cure.

She had married George Dietz, printer, when she was seventeen; and buried him when she was thirty-nine. It was very sad. But it was not as sad as it might have been. For by the time Mrs. Dietz was thirty-nine, Madeline was twenty, and able to support Mrs. Dietz.

Mrs. Dietz, you see, had a Heart. Capital H. (One could no more begin this particular Heart with a little h than one could omit to mention it altogether.) Nobody, said Mrs. Dietz, *nobody* knew just what she suffered with her Heart. True. Nobody did—though it was certainly not Mrs. Dietz's fault.

Because of the Heart, Mrs. Dietz had to be supported. The Heart was a Bolshevist. It declined to allow any toiling or spinning, but insisted upon a régime of movies, naps and rocking chairs. Mrs. Dietz obeyed it to the letter. She said she was afraid not to.

Madeline, reared in the Heart tradition, was afraid not to have her obey.

There was also, of course, that assistant Bolshevist, Mrs. Dietz's back. . . .

"Madeline?"

"Yes."

"Home at last!"

"Yes."

Mrs. Dietz sighed profoundly. From the darkened bedroom, through the open doorway and across the parlor the sigh carried, and Madeline, her fingers still on the inner knob of the hall door, asked, "What is it, Momma? Is anything the matter?"

"Nothin' much. Only my back again."

Mrs. Dietz said this as one might say, "Nothing has happened except an earthquake, a fire and a tornado——"

Madeline's hand left the knob and groped along the wall until it found the bookcase, and the matches in the saucer on the bookcase. She struck one on her shoe, and lit the gas. Home sprang into view. The things of home. The oak center table with the curly feet. The davenport of imitation leather. The two rocking chairs and the other chair. The bookcase. (It held souvenirs.) The limp net curtains that had shrunk somewhat. The potato-colored wall paper. The pictures of Jesus, the Grand Canyon, the late George Dietz, the Vanishing American, the surf at Old Orchard, Maine, "Under the Mistletoe," Colleen Moore, and (rotogravure, unframed) Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh.

The room was small and stuffy, and Madeline opened a window first of all. Then she moved toward the bedroom, dropping her pocketbook on the table en route and hanging her hat to the corner of a chair. She looked tired. The skin that the red hair kissed so prettily was wan, the hazel eyes were shadowed underneath. But she walked with quick, brisk little steps.

"It's a shame," she said. "Does it hurt very bad, Momma?"

She was standing by the bed now, gazing anxiously down. The light from the room adjoining showed her her mother: a mighty mound of bed-clothes, and a pillowed, sad pink face topped with a coronet of patent curlers.

"Terrible," whimpered Mrs. Dietz. "Somethin' terrible. It started about eight o'clock, and I been in misery ever since."

She added, "What time is it now?"

"It's about twelve-thirty."

Mrs. Dietz closed her eyes and rolled her head as far to one side as the curlers would let it go. "I thought you'd never come," she said faintly.

"I'm so sorry. If I'd known——"

Mrs. Dietz's eyes reopened. "Where were you?"

"At a place called Jazzland, on Sixth Avenue."

"Dancin'?"

"Yes."

This was plainly too much for Mrs. Dietz. She closed her eyes again, and lay supine.

"Well," said Madeline, feeling guilty, "anyway, I'm

here now. So what can I do? Shall I get the hot-water bottle for under your back?"

"It's under."

"Oh. Well, can I——"

"But it's cold," said Mrs. Dietz suddenly. She propped herself up on one elbow and reached beneath herself with the other arm. She tugged, and the bedclothes heaved, and the hot-water bag appeared. Mrs. Dietz lay back as though spent with this effort, the bag falling from her limp hand to the floor with a loud *glug!* sound.

Madeline stooped for it. She crossed the room, carrying it, and lit the gas jet beside the huge oak bureau. From a closet shelf she took down a patent burner and a saucepan, and lit the burner and set the pan full of the warmest water the bathroom tap would yield (which was lukewarm) over it.

"Now!" she said. "We'll have some hot in a jiffy." She returned to the bed. "Did you try taking those pills the doctor gave you?"

"I took three. It only says to take two, but I took three."

"And they haven't helped?"

The curlers wagged in piteous negation.

"It's a shame," said Madeline again. "Well—would it help for me to give your back a good rubbing?"

"Maybe," replied Mrs. Dietz, without hope.

"Turn over, then, and I'll try. Where's the alcohol bottle?"

"Under the washstand. Or no, behind the—— Oh, I

don't know," wailed Mrs. Dietz, "where I put it! I'm too sick to think!"

"I'll find it," said Madeline.

Five minutes of rubbing revived Mrs. Dietz somewhat. She was moved to conversation, difficult though (with her face squashed against the pillow and her short breath shorter under Madeline's alive young hands) conversation was.

"H-how's Johnny?" she panted.

"Oh, fine."

"I saw—*her*—s'mornin'——"

(*Her* was Johnny's mother.)

"Did you? Where?" asked Madeline.

"Market. She was—ow! Not so hard!—buyin' berries——"

"Was she?"

"Um. You—shoulda seen her. Pokin' and pinchin' and—feelin' of every last—one that was in the box —*Ow!*"

"I'm sorry, Momma."

"You take the breath out o' me!"

"I'll go easier. What about Mrs. Sebastian?"

"Oh, she says to me—'You're out—early, ain't you? Early for *you,*' she says—sarcastic-like——"

"How's your back now, Momma?" Madeline interrupted gently. "Better?"

"Some."

Madeline went on rubbing.

"Poor white trash," said Mrs. Dietz.

Madeline went on rubbing, lips compressed.

"You say you—were to—Jazzland?" Mrs. Dietz queried, after a pause.

"Yes."

"Have a—good time?"

Another pause, slight, almost imperceptible.

"Yes. Lovely," said Madeline.

She was up the next morning at half past seven, up and nearly dressed, when a knock rat-tatted on the front door of the flat and a high voice called through the panel, "Madeline! Hoo-oo! *Ma-ad*'line!"

"Coming," she called back.

In the bed Mrs. Dietz stirred drowsily. "Who's that?"

"Jewel, I guess."

"What's she want? What time is it?"

Madeline did not answer. She was on her way to the door to find out what Jewel Marek, daughter of P. Marek, Household Furnishings Bought & Sold, did want.

Jewel was tiny and gypsy-dark, with teeth that flashed. She wore an orange crêpe kimono. "Hi, there," she said. "Say, your fella's on the 'phone."

"Johnny?"

Jewel laughed. "How many fellas you got?"

"But it's so early—" Madeline began. Then her puzzled scowl gave way to a business-like expression. "All right. Thanks. I'll be right down, soon as I slip my dress on——"

Descending the stairs, she overtook Jewel on the

third flight down. "What do you s'pose he wants," she demanded, "at this hour in the morning?"

Jewel had no idea.

"He woke you up, didn't he?" Madeline said sympathetically. She sighed. "Oh, well. Some day maybe I'll have a 'phone of my own."

The Marek telephone was entirely surrounded by Household Furnishings Bought, but not yet Sold. It stood on the top of a medicine cabinet, which in turn stood atop a buffet, and as you talked into it you leaned against an ice-box and rested your feet on the rung of a baby's crib. That day you did, at least. Another day you might not. Or even sooner. Interior decoration in *maison* Marek was subject to change without notice. Even before you finished talking the baby's crib might vanish, borne off by hairy, dirty, truckman hands; and when you went to put the telephone back on the medicine cabinet, you might find you were putting it back on a kerosene stove. . . .

"Hello?" said Madeline. "Johnny?"

"Hullo there, baby!"

His voice was so joyous, so jubilant, that Madeline caught her breath. "Oh, what *is* it, Johnny?"

"What is what?"

"Don't tease me," she begged. "Something's happened."

"You're doggone right, something's happened!" crowed Johnny. "But I won't tell you over the 'phone. I want to see your face, when I tell you. Listen: How soon you going to start for work?"

"Why—about the usual time. 'Bout eight-thirty."

"Can't you start any sooner?"

"I'll try. But I've got to get breakfast, and get Momma fixed, and all." She deliberated. "I might be done by quarter past, if I hurry."

"Hurry, then. I'll be waiting for you by the steps."

He was there at eight-thirty, when she came out, teetering there on the curbstone, whistling blithely, with his back to her and his hands in his trousers pockets. She knew an instant's pang of tenderness, poignant, exquisite. He was such a *kid*. And the elbows of his suit were so shiny. . . .

She stole up behind him and linked her arm in his, laughing at his involuntary start. "Don't run," she said. "It's only me."

She had never seen him so happy. She stood looking up at him, at the radiance of his face and the hint of glory in his eyes; and gradually her laughter died, and a certain vague terror was born. This thing that had happened, whatever it was: would it *last?* Was it *sure?* Because if not—if anything went wrong, when he looked like this——

She felt a little sick.

She said, "Tell me what's happened, Johnny. Tell me now."

"*Wait* till you hear!"

"I can't," she whispered, white-lipped.

Johnny, blind with his own glee, noticed nothing. He unhooked his arm from Madeline's, and took her arm with his hand; he began to pilot her along the sidewalk.

"Well," he said, "first let me ask you something." He was pretending to be solemn, trying, as he would have put it, to "keep a straight face." He cleared his throat. "Supposing you and I got married—oh, say about September first? Would you like that, or wouldn't you?"

(This was the twenty-third of July.)

"September—September first?"

Johnny nodded.

"You mean—" her fingers dug her wrist—"you mean, this *coming* September?"

Johnny nodded again.

"Tell me! Oh, go *on!*"

She had forgotten fear. There was nothing now in her mind but eagerness, and the dawn of a joy that matched his.

"We can do it!" Johnny cried, and she believed him. "We can—and we're *going* to!" He turned on her. He was almost shouting. "You hear that, Pinky? We're going to get *married!*"

"Yes!" breathed Madeline. "Yes!" She knew. It was so. Details didn't matter, how didn't matter. They were going to get married.

They stood there on the pavement in front of a fruit stand, staring shining-eyed at one another: the long broad boy in the shabby suit, and the little Titian girl. They were all alone. Shapes drifted past them, voices murmured, elbows brushed their elbows; but they were all alone in the world.

Madeline thought, "September. Eight more days of

July. August—let's see, 'Thirty days hath'—'all the rest have thirty-one'—thirty-one and eight——"

"Thirty-nine," she said aloud.

"Right!" roared Johnny.

They moved away, presently, from the fruit stand. They had not seen it at all. For years to come the odor of fresh peaches would trouble Madeline vaguely, just a little; she would not know why.

Walking along slowly, very close together, oblivious and sunlit and young, they talked things over. Or rather, Johnny talked. Madeline listened, and now and then laughed, a small excited laugh, like flute-notes.

"It's *wonderful!*" she kept saying.

It had to do, the wonderful news, with old Mrs. Lane. Of all people! Madeline had met old Mrs. Lane but once; her recollection of her was a recollection merely of an ear-trumpet and constant cries of "How? How's that?" Old Mrs. Lane was very old. She was eighty-some. She wore yards and yards of greenish black, and had a little mustache. She did not look at all like an answer to prayer. But she was. She was.

Old Mrs. Lane lived on Johnny's street, in the little gray clapboard house that cowered between the two tall tenements, looking meek and scared and countrified. It was her house. Mr. Lane, who had been in Heaven for years and in politics prior to that, had left it to her. (They said on Johnny's street that he had also left her thousands; Johnny's mother thought it was more.) Old Mrs. Lane had always, since Mr. Lane's demise, lived by herself in her house. But now

she was eighty-some. Stairs were harder to climb now, and stoves meaner to manage, and silences were full of strange and frightening sounds, "—and," said old Mrs. Lane to Johnny's mother, "if you want to come and live here and keep me company, you can. It won't cost you nothin'."

Dear old Mrs. Lane!

"Isn't it the darnedest thing," Johnny crowed, "the way things *happen,* Pinky? Just when you think you've reached the end of your rope—Zowie! The old luck turns. Last night—why, say, I was never so discouraged as I was last night! I could've killed myself." He laughed abruptly, rather sheepishly. "Say, we nearly *did,* didn't we?"

"I'll say."

Johnny shook his head. "Darn *fools.* Well, anyway: Here I go home from your house, so low I'd have had to stand on tiptoes to pat a caterpillar—and there's Ma waiting up, just back from Mrs. Lane's, with *this* to spring on me! Jees! Did I feel *good!*"

"I know," said Madeline softly. "Like I feel now." She was wordless a moment, her forehead puckering between the thin curved brows. "Your mother—*wants* to do it, does she?"

"Crazy to! She and Mrs. Lane are awful thick, you know."

Into Madeline's mind flashed an animadversion of her own mother's, oft-repeated: "She certainly shines up to that old Mrs. Lane! Guess she must think she'll get mentioned in the will." . . .

"Listen," continued Johnny. "Here's what we'll do. I got it all doped out. We'll wait till the first of September, for three reasons. One is, that's when I get my vacation. We can go somewhere. Maybe—" his voice soared "—maybe Atlantic City! Or somewhere. Anyway: the second reason is because I'll have to save some money, enough for the ring and the license—and the trip. I'm a little short right now. Some bills I owe. And then, besides, we got to give Ma time. She think: it'll take her about a month to get moved, and pull up stakes, and all. We don't want to rush her."

"No," agreed Madeline.

"So September's about right, don't you think?"

"September's grand," said Madeline.

"So then we'll get married, and then we'll go on the trip. And you'll give up your flat, and we'll get some new furniture and stuff for my place, and—and *live* there! You and me. And your mother, too, of course," he amended, frowning slightly.

"You don't mind, do you, Johnny? Awfully much?"

"N-no. No, of course not. Look!" said Johnny, changing the subject. "Look what's across the street!"

It was old Mrs. Lane's little clapboard house, grown all at once interesting and dear. They gazed at it. Their footsteps slackened. Madeline thought, "Funny I never noticed that cupola thing. And those curtains."

She said, peering, "There's—isn't that her in the window?"

"I guess so," Johnny answered, also peering. "It's something black, anyway."

"I think," said Madeline slowly, "— don't you think we sort of ought to go over and—and speak to her?"

"Well—" doubtfully. "What'd we say?"

Madeline didn't quite know. It would not do, of course, to thank old Mrs. Lane for taking Johnny's mother off their hands—not that, exactly——

"We'll go some other time," decided Johnny. "We're late enough now as it is."

He spoke truly. It was twenty minutes after nine when Madeline finally reached the Broadway beauty shop where she worked. Her first client of the morning had been waiting nineteen minutes, and had not liked it at all. But she did not say so. There was something about Madeline's face that day that made it impossible to scold her, just as it is impossible to scold a flower, or a star, or a singing bird.

The day was an average beauty shop day, no better, no worse. There was the smell of soap and steam, and the faint oily smell of hair. There was the hiss of water, and the dryer's hot whine, and the rattle of marcelling irons. There was the bustle of slender white-clad girls with rolled-up sleeves; the cacophony of conversations: ". . . and so then I got mad, and" . . . "ten minutes is long enough for the henna" . . . "you know my husband *hates* bobbed hair, and I always told him" . . . "swell show at Roxy's" . . . "because your cuticle is very dry" . . . "I hear she's suing him for divorce" . . . "well, don't mention this, she told me in confidence, but the trouble was that his first wife"

. . . "a facial? Certainly, Madam. Miss Yvonne! Facial in Booth Three." . . .

Every half hour there were ten new fingers on the little pad in front of Madeline. Every half hour she smiled, "How-do-you-do?" and took her nickel bowl with the paper frill inside to the back room for new soapy water; returned, and set the bowl down, and picked up the file, and said, "Pointed? Do you want them any shorter?" She worked well. She made neat, rosy nails out of nails that had been neither. And she never really saw a single nail.

At twelve, on her way to lunch, she called up Johnny from a pay-station. "I don't know why I'm calling," she told him amusedly. "I haven't a thing to say."

They talked for twelve minutes.

Her luncheon was a cup of cocoa with beady whipped cream and a cream-cheese-and-jelly sandwich. Net expenditure: forty cents. She had three dollars and seventy-four cents in her pocketbook after the check was paid. This must feed her, and transport her, all the rest of the week.

On her way back to the beauty shop she stopped and bought a seven dollar chiffon chemise. Three dollars down.

There are times when food for the mood is more important.

Curiously enough, it was the thought of that chemise —but wait. I go ahead of myself.

July had been ripped from Madeline's calendar and

scrunched into a ball and thrown away, and nine of the days in August had been crossed out with pencil crosses, when old Mrs. Lane abruptly died.

She died in the morning. At least, they found her in the morning, lying very still in bed, with a set of teeth grinning in a half a glass of water on the little table by the bedside. . . .

Johnny heard before noon. His mother telephoned him. But Madeline had hours of grace, and did not hear a word till evening.

She was washing the supper dishes when Johnny came. She heard him on the stairs, his familiar tread, and the dish-rag and the platter with the yellow poppies on it slipped back into the water and were drowned. Madeline ran to dry her hands and touch her nose with powder. "And I'll *always,*" she vowed to the mirror, "look nice when he comes. No shiny nose or curlers when I'm married, any more than when I'm just his girl."

She had the door open before he reached it; was standing on the threshhold, vivid head ducked forward. "Slow-poke!" she called him. And laughed caressingly. And pulled his head down so she could kiss him, using his ears for handles. . . .

"Momma's out," she said, when the door was closed. "She's gone to see Greta Garbo. Honey, don't put your hat there—one of us'll sit on it, sure."

She moved the hat; laid it on the table, her fingers lingering along its brim. She seated herself on the davenport, and patted the leather beside her. "Park," she

directed. She surveyed him maternally. "You look done up, Johnny."

"I am."

"Had a hard day?"

He nodded, evading her eyes.

"Make *my* place," said Madeline.

Her place was the curve of his arm when he leaned back sideways in his corner. He arranged this, and Madeline snuggled in, so that her pink left ear lay over his heart.

"Now!" she sighed. "Go on. What was so hard about it?"

"About today?"

"Yes. Was Gillan on the war-path? You ought to hear your heart, Johnny. *'Bump—bump—bump—'* it goes."

He smiled faintly. "Doesn't everybody's?"

"Not so loud, I don't think. *My,* it's loud!"

"You're pretty near it," Johnny said.

They sat still. Madeline listened to the heart, and then she listened absently to the sounds from the street outside. Summer evening sounds, confused and pleasant. Children shouting. Car horns. A player-piano in the house across, playing *Rio Rita.* . . . Madeline's lashes drooped. She felt drowsy, seeped in peace. Her hand stole up and touched Johnny's face, his cheek and the hard fine line of his jaw. "Isn't this nice?" she murmured. "Aren't we—happy?"

The quick intake of his breath was like a sob. It startled her. She lifted her head, and her gray eyes

were wide, probing his. "Oh, *what?*" she almost moaned.

Then he told her.

At first she didn't believe it. He was wrong. He was mistaken. What he said *could not* be true. . . . Somehow, it had not occurred to her that old Mrs. Lane, being mortal, must go the way of every mortal thing. She had thought of her as living on and on in the little gray house, looking just the same, crying, "How? How's that?" and listening through her ear-trumpet to Johnny's mother, forever. . . .

Then all at once it was clearly true. Old Mrs. Lane was dead. Her little house would be sold, or let; and when September came, Johnny's mother wouldn't go —anywhere.

"And," said Madeline slowly, thinking aloud, "we're right where we were. We're—right back—where we were—before."

He needed her bravery, and so she was brave, quiet and even-voiced and calm. She put her arms around him, and crooned soothing things, the old, two-year-old soothing things. Everything would be all right. They'd find a way. After all, they were young. They had lots of time. A little extra delay—what did it amount to, in a lifetime?

She might, at this rate, have been smiling soon, and making Johnny smile, had the thought of the chiffon chemise not intruded. She didn't know why she thought of the chemise. She just did. It slid uninvited into her mind, that beautiful thing, colored like dawn, foaming

with delicate lace. She had brought it home, all paid for, only today.

She got to her feet mechanically. "Johnny—I want to show you——"

She went into the bedroom, and immediately was back, carrying a glossy white box. She removed the lid, and gently, by its shoulder ribbons, lifted out the gossamer fragment. Bits of tissue paper fell unheeded to the floor, drifting like plumes.

"Isn't it—beautiful, Johnny?"

"Gee, it is," he said, staring dully. And then, manlike, "Is it new?"

Madeline held it over her dress. She caught it close at the hip, and pointed her toe, and turned this way and that, gazing down. She had forgotten Johnny. "Beautiful," she breathed. "I never had—anything so beautiful."

Suddenly she remembered him; caught what he had said. "Um-hum. New," she answered. "I got it today." Her gray eyes lifted, grazed him, went beyond him. "I bought it for—Atlantic City——"

Then she was crying, clutched tight in his arms. Crying as if her heart would break. And she had a dim sense that he was crying too, that the tears on her face were not all her tears, and the sobs that shook them both not all her sobs. They clung together, desperately, like two in a storm who fear to stir apart, lest it destroy them.

Long they clung like that, till their anguish spent itself and all the tears they had were cried away. Till

their kiss [illegible]s pitiful, more fierce. Till it came to them tha[illegible] after two years of waiting, was a cold and [illegible], useless thing.

Mrs. Dietz was reading a magazine with rough gray leaves and a red-lipped sloe-eyed cover. She was rocking as she read, back and forth, back and forth, creak-*clump!* creak-*clump!* on the floor. There were chocolates at her elbow in a paper bag, and another magazine sprawled at her feet. A movie magazine. Mrs. Dietz had read it through.

She turned a rough gray leaf of the magazine that was not a movie magazine, and as she did so, paused; for somebody was coming up the stairs. It sounded like Madeline. But, thought Mrs. Dietz, it wouldn't be Madeline. Not at half past ten A.M., with everybody wanting their nails fixed for Thanksgiving Day, and this the day before.

It was, however, Madeline.

She came in slowly, looking white and queer; looking straight at Mrs. Dietz. She let the door bang, which was not her way, and dropped on the chair that stood just inside it.

"Hello," she said.

"Well!" said Mrs. Dietz.

She closed her magazine, and put it near the chocolates, and folded her hands on her stomach. "Well!" she said. "I suppose you've lost your job, or something."

"No."

"It looks like it," accused Mrs. Dietz.

Madeline took her hat off, as though it pinched her head. She twisted it in her hands, and inspected it. "I got—I wasn't feeling well," she explained. "So they sent me home. In a taxi."

"Wasn't feelin' well?"

"Not very," Madeline said.

She stood up, and wriggled out of her coat, and dropped it behind her on the chair. "I think I'll lie down——"

She took five steps toward the bedroom; stopped; and whirled to confront her mother. There was a defiance in her attitude, and there was a curious, weary triumph. "Johnny and I are going to be married this afternoon," she said. "I've just talked to him, on Marek's 'phone."

"Married?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Dietz stared.

"*You* know," Madeline said, a little wildly. "License —and minister——"

Mrs. Dietz still stared, her mouth working, emitting no sound.

"I—I don't know exactly how we'll manage," Madeline said. "I guess you and—and Mrs. Sebastian will have to do the best you can. Together, I mean. In one flat. Because——"

"Because *what?"* shot out her mother.

"Because—well——"

Mrs. Dietz wept. She clutched her heart. She walked

the floor and wrung her hands, as she had seen it done in Reel Five. She said, many, many times, "Oh, what did I *do* that you should disgrace me like this? Oh, my God, what did I *ever* do?"

DÉBUTANTE

DÉBUTANTE

SHE was a little weary of almost everything, and this showed in her eyes, which were restless, discontented; eyes of a strange and beautiful blue, which sought they knew not what, and said, "Not here. It is not here." Young men became tremendously perturbed by Diane's eyes. Their vanity reacted violently and instantly. *"I'm* here! Don't overlook *me!"* they said . . . with flowers, with invitations. . . .

This sort of thing had been going on since she was fifteen. In other words, for six hysterical years.

She lived in New York, in a plump stone house with an iron-grilled plate-glass door; and she and her family were News to the newspapers. They were captions: "Mr. Franklin F. Withrow, President of the Merchants and Traders Bank." "Mrs. Franklin Frazer Withrow, Chairman of the Committee for the Benefit Ball on December 19th." "Miss Diane Withrow, Charming Débutante Daughter of," etc.

The Withrows, in short. Their name was an old New York name, illustrious, haughty. Diane wore it like a medal pinned to her consciousness. She always wore it. No matter what she did—and she did slightly outré things—she was Diane Withrow still. Diane playing proletarian. *La reine s'amuse.*

Of course a brilliant marriage was expected of her; and she had lately taken steps in that direction, by becoming engaged—unofficially as yet—to Norman Collister. This was brilliant enough to suit even Diane's majestic carved-ivory mother. For Collisters had led armies, and signed treaties, and governed; the blood that coursed their veins was very red and very blue. And somewhere on their gallant way down through the centuries, they had acquired a most amazing fortune—Norman's now. He was the last of all of them.

"The trouble is," said Diane, "that you'd know it."

Diane's mother did not understand.

"You'd know he was the last of something. He has that look. He's a Collister, but—blurred a little. Diluted. Like the last cocktail out of the shaker,—if you see what I mean."

"Diane!"

"Well? Isn't he?"

"Diane," said her mother with unconscious humor and great gravity, "really, I don't believe you love him!"

Diane made her eyes grow wide. "What is 'love'?" she begged to know.

She had promised to marry Norman for a number of reasons that, if not good, were good enough. Because she was bored. Because nothing was fun any more. Because it was time she married, and he was appropriate, as appropriate as any man she knew, and as congenial. Because she had felt especially listless that afternoon when he came, and because there had been

drizzling rain outdoors, and firelight and warmth and a vague sweet peace inside. . . .

Norman was thirty-four. A slender, not very tall young man, in carefully careless English clothes. He was rather handsome. His profile in particular was handsome, having the classic Collister nose, the noble forehead. He affected a little brown mustache, like two mandolin-picks, and parted his thinning straight brown hair in the middle. His skin was sallow. His eyes protruded a trifle, and the lids always looked as if he had been awake but a very few minutes. *Boutonnières* became him. French motor cars became him, and club lounges, and long drawing rooms at tea time. You could not imagine him in an office. Fortunately, you were not obliged to try. He had no office.

It was said by those who should have known that no one in New York did nothing quite as expertly as Norman.

It was also said, with mingled blame and admiration, that nobody but Norman could drink like that and *live*. . . .

You have two angles of this story's little troubled triangle. Nick Rambeau was, surprisingly, the third. "Panther" Rambeau, the newspapers called him; and not many pages beyond the pictures of Diane there were pictures of him, in satin trunks and fat, grim leather mittens.

He had beaten McHenry, The Murderer from Maine, and he had knocked out Juggernaut Jordan

in five rounds. He was en route to the championship. One more victorious bout—the one with Eddie Schiller, scheduled for June—and he would be the Champion's challenger. It was April now. Baseball was beginning, varsity crews were on the rivers; still there was room in the special bright limelight allotted to young men of muscle for Nicholas Rambeau. There would always be room for him. A more colorful athlete never gladdened a sports-reporter's heart, nor eased his task.

For one thing, Rambeau had been in the war. That was worth a column any weekday or Sunday, that tale of enlistment at seventeen without parental consent, of service in France with the Royal Flying Corps, of a medal or two. His parents themselves were worth a column. The Kansas farmer father, who had wanted to make a farmer of his son. The mother who prayed and watched the clock on fight nights.

After the War he had worked his way through a little Western college. Another perennial column there. You were told how he stoked the furnaces of the President and the Dean, and shoveled snow, and waited on table. You learned that he had captained several teams, and worn a Greek-lettered pin. Also that he had written verse for the campus magazine. He might, you inferred, have turned poet in earnest, had not Fate intervened. Fate in the person of one "Grizzly" Leary of old-time fistic fame, who had stood, incognito, in the college gym one day and watched him box. . . .

He made New York his headquarters now, and trained near a lake in New Hampshire; and you read

that Society had taken him up. It was not quite true. Mrs. Franklin Frazer Withrow, for example, remained indifferent to, even ignorant of, his existence. But there were lesser ladies with more and larger diamonds who rejoiced to make a guest-of-honor of him. There was a certain gaudy spendthrift set whose latest fad he was.

The only remarkable thing about Diane's meeting Nick Rambeau was her knowing the Salisburys, who introduced him. Mrs. Withrow would never, never have known the Salisburys. But Diane, of a more promiscuous generation, not only knew but actually quite liked them. And when, entering a hotel tea room late one April afternoon, she discovered them seated at a corner table, it was really not at all the sight of the blond young giant with them that caused her to say to Norman, "Let's go sit with Syd and Betty——"

The tea room was full of dreamy topaz light and muted voices; redolent of flowers, and scent, and orange marmalade. Its tables were stunted, knee-high, and some of its seats were couches. Palms in clusters grew from its mossy carpet, here and there. On the tables the silver was shiny, the cups were fragile as shells, and pale white hands with patches of pink luster at the tips broke toast in little pieces, prettily. The atmosphere was intimate—flirtatious. You sensed that things which were not meant were murmured, that vows which were not tenable were made.

Diane and Norman sat with the Salisburys and the blond young giant. Diane hadn't listened to his name. She never listened to names during introductions, but

looked at eyes, and found the names out later if it proved worth while to know. She would find out later about this man. "Nick," they were calling him. Nick who? His face was dimly familiar.

She pulled her coat off, assisted by Salisbury, and waved away a proffered menu-card. "Orange Pekoe," she said, "with lemon. Cinnamon toast. Has anyone my kind of cigarette?"

"Always," said Norman.

The lighter made a brief and tiny glow upon her face. She could feel the eyes of the *inconnu,* gray thoughtful eyes, regarding her. It diverted her to lift her lashes suddenly, and catch him at it. She knew he would redden. He did.

"Child," she thought.

But he was huge! The widest shoulders. Betty and Norman at his left and right seemed yards apart, absurdly separated. Shoulders like Atlas. And arms to match. And hands. He picked up a little sandwich, paper-thin; just so he could pick up the table, if he liked. Or that potted palm.

"Or Norman."

She thought this idly, not maliciously at all; and envisioning it, laughed aloud. Betty Salisbury said at once in a plaintive voice, "Wait! It isn't time to laugh yet," and went on with a story which, Diane now realized, she had been telling for some time. A story about her chauffeur. "So then, my dear, he started out, armed with *quarts* of our best champagne——"

Diane listened a moment, sipping her tea. She looked

at Betty, at Betty's mouth of scarlet salve, at her heavy onyx earrings like preposterous licorice drops; and mused that it really was a shame Betty overdid everything so, and that somebody ought to take her in hand. She glanced past Sydney, chubby and bland and pink with a barber-shop pinkness. . . . Norman, she saw, was bored, and annoyed at finding himself here. He deplored the Salisburys. "They need to be aged in the wood," he had said once, "for a great many years. And even then!"

Diane's eyes returned to the man called Nick. "Terribly attractive," she decided. His teeth were very white in his outdoor face, and his hair was crisp and light and rather curly. His eyebrows were black. Thick, conspicuous—they accented him, suggesting a temper, a storminess, that was not in his gray eyes nor in the amiable breadth of his mouth. "He could hate you," thought Diane.

Then she averted her gaze in a hurry, for he had glanced up and caught *her*—whether with retaliatory intent, she was not sure. Certainly, if deliberate, the trick was successful; to her immense surprise she felt her own cheeks grow warm, and saw her right hand almost, though not quite, upset her cup.

"Now this," she told herself sternly, "is too idiotic."

Betty's story was finished. Diane turned to Sydney beside her, and asked him something about a horse he had bought recently. But with the first words of his reply she thought wearily, "Oh, don't bother. Of course I didn't really want to know."

Her mind strayed back across the table. Nick was talking now. He had the voice he should have had, pleasant and low. An accent not quite of New York. Where, then? Who *was* he?

He was answering questions: "Yes. No. The fourteenth, it is."

"At night, I suppose?" Norman sounded actually interested.

"Yes."

"I'll be there!" Betty sang. "We're coming back from Paris for it. All that long way, Nicky, just for you!"

"Don't," he advised. "It couldn't possibly be worth it."

Diane looked across at him again. He was looking straight at her. For just an instant their glances locked, and this time it was different. An instant like a caught breath, like a lightening in the veins.

"*Worth* it?" Betty's shrill voice jarred. "Don't be ridic! We'd come from the ends of the earth—wouldn't we, Syd?" She added, "Syd doesn't hear me. He's talking about his colt. He never hears, when he is. Do you, dear?"

"What?" said Syd.

"I told you," Betty nodded to the others.

Diane thought, "Will everybody *please* keep still?"

Something had happened to her. Something dim as yet. There must be less confusion, then she could understand it, she could say to it, "Advance, be recognized."

Betty was addressing her. "Darling, more tea?"

"No, thank you."

"Drop?"

Diane shook her head.

Betty set the silver teapot down again. *"Tea!"* she said with sudden scorn. "What's the sense? Let's go up to our house and mix something pink and cold. Shall we? Diane? Mr. Collister?" She turned her head—— "Oh, poor Nicky! But you can have lemonade."

"Aren't you drinking?" Diane smiled across the little table.

"My dear!" cried Betty. "Would he be?—with a fight only two months off?"

"A fight?" said Diane.

Her smile hovered, uncertain. Under the upcurled brief brim of her hat, her brows drew slightly together. She surveyed Nick. She was questioning him, directly, in a way that forbade anyone else to answer or explain.

There was a barely perceptible pause. Then Nick said quietly, eyes on hers, "Yes. You see, I'm—I box. Professionally."

"Oh!" said Diane.

Another instant's pause. Music played somewhere. Silver clinked. A waiter's black sleeve slanted to the table like a missile, set something down, and took itself away.

"Why——" stammered Betty, "Diane—this is *Nick Rambeau,* dear! Haven't you—don't you know——"

"Why should she?" Nick said nicely, at once. "The number of people in the world who've never heard of me, Betty, is only exceeded by the number who never will."

His smile was cheerful, flashing-white; but his eyes were somber and troubled, fixed on Diane. "Does it make a difference?" they were asking her. "Aren't you going to like me—any more?"

Diane thought, "This is the strangest moment I've ever lived through." Other than that, no single thing was clear.

She heard herself saying that she *did* know Nick Rambeau. "I simply didn't grasp your name, before. Of course I know." For proof, she plunged into a grab-bag of confused vague recollection, and produced: "You were an aviator! Weren't you? And—and you read."

The patronizing note in this, striking her ears, stopped her voice. She felt apologetic. Bit her lip.

Nick still smiled. "No," he said. "You're a little mixed. Tunney reads."

"Nick writes sonnets," Betty said, and she and Nick and Sydney all smiled, as at a joke of long standing.

"As a matter of fact," continued Betty, "he does read. Prodigiously. You ought to *see* the things! Law-books, and ghastly things."

Norman blew slow smoke. "You're studying law, Rambeau?"

"Trying to," Nick responded. "Off and on."

"With a view to a future legal career?"

"I hope so. One or two more fights," said Nick—to Diane—, "then I mean to quit, and go to Law School. If they'll take me."

"You don't like fighting?" Norman asked.

Nick hesitated. "I like the money." His eyes left Diane's, and contemplated the water goblet which he twisted by its stem in thumb and finger. "You see," he said, "I never had—any money at all. In that case, you do what you can, so that ultimately you may do what you want to."

Then his head came up with a jerk, and Diane again was conscious of the dominating darkness and grimness of his brows. "I sound as though I were ashamed of being a pugilist." He looked at Diane. "I'm not," he said.

Diane thought, "Well!" A startled little gasp in her mind.

He had subtly defied her, he had said, in effect. "If you are such a snob——" His massive shoulders seemed to shrug. His eyes were pleading no longer. They were challenging. "Well!" thought Diane.

She decided to be angry. Who was *he* to shrug at her? She decided to be loftily amused. This *prize-fighter!* She gave her mouth a small disdainful quirk, and raised her lashes—and suddenly saw that her heart would have him, whoever he was, whatever he did.

There were two weeks. Fifteen days exactly before the day when Nick with his retinue, his trainers and

sparring partners, his manager, "Grizzly" Leary of the sidelong slippery mouth, and the twenty or thirty newspaper men assigned to cover his camp, would leave for New Hampshire. . . . Somehow it was not possible for Diane and Nick to project their minds beyond those fifteen days. Nick would train, of course; he would return and fight his fight; *and then?* They did not know. They did not dare to think or wonder much.

They were terribly in love, and neither of them had ever really been in love before; and now was now. They would not spoil it. Only with their eyes did they speak of the future, admit the future's looming obstacles. With their lips they smiled and were gay, and often lightly said, "When we are married——"

Sometimes Diane thought, "I will. I'll marry him. He's everything I want. Who *cares* what anybody says?" That was when she was with him, looking at him, listening to him; held against his heart by his great arms.

Sometimes she raged within herself at all the world of chill proud aristocracy that was her world. "So stupid! So *narrow!* If they had any sense at all, they'd *see* how infinitely more worth while he is than—than Norman—— But they won't. They wouldn't. They'd only think of what he *does*." . . .

Sometimes, sadly eying her mother's pale patrician face, her father's hands—the slender tapering Withrow hands that had not soiled themselves for generations,—she thought, "I can't. I *can't*."

Once she said to her mother, very casually, "Have you ever heard of Nick Rambeau?"

"Who is he?"

"Well—he's a perfectly nice person who—who's boxing, to make money to put himself through Law School——"

" 'Boxing'?"

"Yes."

"You mean that is his business?"

"Temporarily, yes."

Mrs. Withrow looked at her. "You know him, Diane?"

"I met him the other day——"

"Where?"

"At tea. Norman was with me. One meets him," Diane said. "People have taken him up."

"What people?" Mrs. Withrow queried.

It was very depressing.

She could not tell Nick, in so many words, why it was she always met him away from her house, why she preferred the table in the corner behind the palm in the obscure, unheard-of restaurant or tea room. . . . She knew he knew. But they never talked about it, save to agree that publicity would dim the shine of things.

Crowds were not for them. Music and dancing and bright lights were not. They were fugitives from their own notoriety, hunted and hounded by it; forever looking to see who was looking. People everywhere recognized Nick. There was a "scoop" for the jour-

nalist who spied him holding hands with Diane Withrow, débutante.

Nick had an apartment on the west side, but he said it was no place for Diane to visit. "There's always a gang, you see. It's a sort of headquarters for—cauliflower ears. I couldn't ask you there."

Once, however, yielding to prolonged persuasion, he did take her to see it. Diane was enchanted with the study in contrasts it afforded, as of etchings, first editions, a grand piano on the one hand, and of signed framed photographs of posturing fighters and the very pair of gloves that had felled the mighty Jordan, on the other. The inspection tour might have been a thorough success, had not Nick's manager appeared toward its end and somehow succinctly contrived to make Diane feel, as she afterwards said, "Like the sort of girl who writes mash-notes."

She never went back there.

Their favorite rendezvous became, in the end, a taxi-cab; one built in such a way that they rode in kindly shadows. Diane felt safer in a taxi in the Park than anywhere else in all the peering town. Sometimes they rode for hours. Till darkness came. Till ahead of them the driver was a life-sized paper sticker, cut out of black and glued against the glass.

Two glad, sad weeks. Then they parted—in a taxi—one windy May day, with matter-of-fact assurance of reunion on their tongues and terror standing starkly in their eyes. Diane will never forget that afternoon. She will not even forget that the cab was

upholstered in brown plush, that the stub of a straw-tipped cigarette was caught in the mesh of the mat on its floor, nor that, when Nick got out at last, and left her, and shut the door, it did not, for all his strength, quite latch. . . .

Then there were his letters. And the newspaper stories. Those two things, to live on. Letters double-enveloped, double-stamped, that told of his love and loneliness. And column after column after column of print that said he was fit, he was sanguine, he had beaten two sparring-partners today, he had tramped ten miles and eaten steak and green beans for his dinner. . . .

In one of his letters he asked for a snapshot of Diane. "You needn't be afraid of its being seen. I'll be very careful; and I need it so. I can't visualize you, quite, without it. Oh, I remember your hair, and how it waves from a little part. And I remember your eyes, how blue and glorious they are, and your eyelashes with gold flecks on the ends. I can remember everything about you, separately. But when I try to add them up, it's vague and indistinct, as if I'd dreamed you."

Once he wrote: "I can't say what I want to say. You're who you are—and I'm a pug. Your money's ages old, and I've yet to make mine, by punching another pug till he drops, or I drop, for the crowd to see. I realize better than you think the distances between us. But I *hope*. Diane, if I shouldn't, if there

isn't any hope, you'd tell me, wouldn't you? I'd rather know."

She had the papers every morning with her breakfast tray, and devoured them while her coffee cooled. Oftentimes there were pictures. Nick shaking hands with someone. Nick putting on a golf green. Nick shadow-boxing; skipping rope. Often, too, there were pictures of his adversary, Schiller. A dark, square-headed brute of a man with an out-thrust jaw and black mussed hair through which he glared at cameras . . . frightening Diane. . . .

May became June. Fourteen days before the fight. Thirteen. Twelve. Eleven. Ten. There were more pictures now than ever, sticks more type, and bigger heads. A mounting tense excitement—expression of a national sadism—which grew and spread in the sport sections, monopolizing them; which, on the day of the fight and the day after, would spill over onto Page One, crowding politics and murders and trans-Atlantic flights to the corners.

Nick sent Diane two tickets. "You said you wanted to see it. If you do, here are good seats. But I wish you wouldn't."

She was in the country with her parents then, having left town the first of June. At dinner-time on the evening before the fight, Nick telephoned her. "Mr. Nicholas," said the butler, "is calling from New York for Miss Diane."

She left the table absent-mindedly carrying her napkin of linen and embroidery and lace.

At the transmitter, her breath choked her. "H-how are you?" she said, and added, "Oh, it's so *good* to hear your voice!——"

They talked for ten minutes.

"Why don't you want me to come tomorrow night?" Diane asked.

"Oh—I don't know——"

"Is it for my sake? Or is it for yours? I mean, would it bother you the least little bit if you knew I was there?"

"No," said Nick, "I don't believe so, but——"

"But what?"

"Nothing," Nick said. "You might as well, I suppose."

She got Norman to take her. "Remember," she asked him, "that day we had cocktails at the Salisbury's, with that Nick Rambeau? I told him I'd never seen a prize-fight, and apparently it made a deep impression—because look!" She exhibited the tickets. "These came yesterday, with his compliments."

"The country" was Long Island; that polite, neat wilderness, that rusticity-with-a-manicure. From the stone gates at the foot of Diane's father's private driveway to the Fifty-ninth Street bridge was forty miles. They covered it in the late afternoon, in Norman's limousine, and upon their arrival went to tea with friends.

There was no tea. Norman drank too much from tall iced glasses.

They dined about eight o'clock, by themselves, at a

mid-town restaurant. Dined fully and leisurely—too leisurely, Diane thought. Nick would fight at ten, and the Yankee Stadium was a hundred cluttered blocks away from here. "Let's hurry," she kept urging. "We won't get there, if we don't."

She could have slain him when he had to have a second demi-tasse.

The fight was in the air. Everywhere were its vibrations. In the streets the newsboys cried with ceaseless raucous voices, and motor cars bound north blew frantic horns. In the restaurant, at little white-gowned tables round about, people were discussing odds, and rights, and hooks, and reaches. Diane caught Nick's name a dozen different times, and each time she glanced quickly at the table of the speaker, as if it were her name that had been called.

"You're so quiet, my dear!"

"Am I?"

Her smile was wan. She was over-wrought almost beyond endurance. "Let me alone!" she thought. "Drink your coffee."

When the check was paid, there was another delay; Norman was negotiating for liquor. Diane, standing in the foyer, pulling on her gloves, saw him deep in converse with the *maître d'hôtel,* and the sight snapped her taut nerves, all at once.

"Norman," she said quietly but quite distinctly.

He half turned. "Just a minute——"

"I'm going," said Diane, *"now."*

In the limousine they argued just a little about it.

"It wouldn't have taken a second," Norman said. "Gustave had some genuine——"

"But you don't need it."

Norman smiled. "Am I being accused," he enunciated carefully, "of over-indulgence? This is interesting."

Diane shook her head. Her voice sounded very tired. "No. The point is, you brought plenty along. There's more than a pint in the flask in that pocket on the door. Don't you remember?"

"I hadn't," said Norman. "I do now."

He looked pleased. He leaned toward the pocket and removed the flask, together with six silver cups nested in a case.

"A touch?" he asked Diane.

She refused. Norman filled a cup, and drank the contents. He refilled it. For this second libation he seemed to feel that some verbal justification was in order. "Here's to Rambeau," he said. "May he always get up again."

"Have you money on him?"

"More or less. I think he's the better man."

Diane was silent a moment.

"Yes," she said. "He is. By far."

Blocks from the Stadium they were forced to leave the car, and walk through the increasing hurlyburly. It was quarter of ten. The streets were full of latecomers like themselves, like them infected with a sudden fever to get on, to get inside, to be there, and at once. People pushing, shoving, diving ahead. Diane

found herself pushing. She found herself using her elbows ruthlessly; becoming angry. She was one of the mob. Not so Norman. Norman's attitude, when bumped or in any wise impeded, was one of aggrieved and hurt surprise. "My dear fellow!" he protested several times.

Diane had to nag him along by the sleeve.

"Give me the tickets," she commanded, when they were near.

Then there were gates, and guardians with ticket-weary eyes. Then a vast resounding vault, a fetid dim inferno. Then a concrete runway whereon eight could move abreast, sloping upward, turning, sloping on. . . .

And they were there.

Diane saw the ring first, the little square of brilliance. Standing beside Norman in the aisle atop a tier, waiting for an usher to attend them, she stared at it, with shining startled eyes and shortened breath. It looked so small, so far away; like a lantern in the monstrous pit of shadow. (Surely she could reach down and lift it by the handle that must be at the top somewhere!) Patterns on the lantern. Tiny men, who stirred and shifted——

"Is that *Nick?*" she cried, and never knew she called him "Nick."

Some man standing near her answered her; Norman was attempting to flag ushers with his stick. "Naw," said the man, "them're Stacey an' Red Andrews. This is the semi-final."

"Thank you," Diane murmured.

Her throat unlocked. Not yet. Not yet. She stared at the ring again, curiously. Stacey and Red Andrews wore purple trunks and red trunks and seemed to be holding one another up, with arms on shoulders, like friendly inebriates. A man in white pried them apart. They did it again. So this was prize-fighting?

While she still watched, there was a lightening all over the great deep lap of gloom that was the Stadium, and in the ring one figure—the red-trunked one—raised his arm. Scattered people clapped and others more numerous booed, making a weird inhuman banshee sound. "Oh, what is it?" Diane said, and once again the man beside her helped her:

"Andrews got the decision, an' the crowd don't like it. They think some of his punches was too low."

"And now what happens?"

"The main bout's next. Schiller 'n' Rambeau. You'll see 'em come in, in a few minutes."

Then an usher appeared, and she followed him, Norman following her, down a thin gully of steps between the banks of people, across a sort of roadway littered with programs and pop-bottles, and into a path that led direct to the ring. They were near it now, and getting nearer. It wasn't small at all any more. It was big and smoky-bright, and slightly elevated, like a setting on a stage in a play. Below it, in three rows of special seats that hugged its base, the working press presented hunched-up shoulders to the view, and made a furious clattering clicking noise.

"Here," said the usher. "Fourteen and fifteen."

They were in the very front ringside row; no seats but the press seats could be closer. "Well!" exclaimed Norman. "This is excellent! Isn't it?"

"Of course," thought Diane.

She said nothing. Merely nodded. Presently she asked, "Where do they come in, Norman? Which aisle?"

Norman didn't know. "You never know," he said.

"It's five minutes of," said Diane.

Again there was that sensation of tightness in her throat, and she could feel her heart insanely thudding. She looked around. The people near were people, with noses and eyes, but all the rest were polka dots. Thousands upon thousands. You knew they were alive, because their matches flared abruptly, here, there, over there, all over; and part of the tension in the atmosphere was theirs, and part of the muttering monotone. But they seemed printed. . . . She looked straight up. Above the empty ring the lights were round, like yellow coins. Beyond them there were camera-men on lofty little platforms. And far beyond, above the furthest bank of polka dots, a lighted elevated train was sliding slowly by, as if it would like very much to tarry.

"Extraordinary scene," said Norman, "isn't it?"

"Isn't it?"

"A touch?" said Norman. He had brought the flask and cups along.

"No. Certainly not, in a place like this."

"Well—do you object if I do?"

"No."

She said it absently. Her mind was full of three words: "There's Schiller's father." Someone sitting back of her had uttered them, just now. And pointed, probably. "There's Schiller's father."

Would they, some future night, some smoky crazy night like this, say, "There's Rambeau's wife"—and point at *her?*

She had no time to think about it. Somebody was coming, heralded by a roaring and a booing from the back. The people rose as wedding guests rise to greet a bride—but differently; they surged, and climbed on seats. Diane climbed on her seat. Her face was drained of color. Her left hand, touching Norman's shoulder for support, gripped fiercely, till the knuckles showed pale.

But it was Schiller. Schiller with a growth of ugly black beard on his face and a sweater tied by the sleeves around his throat. He came in the hurrying midst of a little knot of police and attendants, and he grinned and saluted and swaggered as he walked. And there was bedlam. . . .

Diane got down off her chair and sat in it.

In a minute Schiller was at the ring, crawling in between the ropes. He stood and held his fists together high, for the crowd to see, and faced around so everyone could see them. He had a great square body on a pair of slender legs. His hairy skin was stuffed with slippery muscles.

"I can't bear him," Diane told Norman. "I can't bear to look at him. He's like an ape." Oh, what would

he do to Nick with those horrible hands, what would he *do?*

"Here comes Rambeau," said Norman.

This time she kept her seat. A sort of rigor was upon her. She could hear the wild redoubled tumult all around her, hazily she could see the ring and the faces of reporters, turned upon their shoulders, just below it; but she could not stir.

Out of the corner of her eye she watched the aisle, six seats away; and breath and thought and being stopped while she waited.

Then he came, smiling, magnificent as a god, with a robe of dark red hung upon his shoulders . . . and all at once her heart swelled like a thing blown up too much. Here was her man. *Hers.* And forty thousand people cheering. She learned what pride was in that instant, she who had believed she knew. She learned what it was to want to rise and scream to all the world her arrogant possessiveness. "He's *mine!*"

He was up in the ring now, saluting the crowd in a hasty, boyishly diffident way. Would he see her, Diane wondered? She was so very near. Did he remember where he'd seated her, and would he look? The commotion was deafening.

"He certainly is the favorite," Norman said. "No doubt of that. Most of the money is on him."

Would he look?

Somebody had swung a stool for him into the corner nearest them. He approached it now, and as he came his eyes plunged down. . . . Diana thought they

found her, but she was not sure. He made no sign. He was not smiling now.

He sat down with his bathrobed back to her, his elbows resting on the ropes. Men in old soiled jerseys gathered about him. One bore gloves. Diagonally across the ring Schiller was sitting, having his hands bandaged, Norman said. He looked less alarming now. He seemed to have shrunk a little. Over the bent backs of his busy seconds he peered at Nick, and scowled. "Pooh," thought Diane, "who's afraid of *you?*"

She forgot him. She fixed her gaze on Nick, on the back of his blond head, and kept it there unblinkingly. Minute followed minute. The crowd was still yelling. Nick took his bronzed bare elbows off the ropes and leaned forward for the bandages and gloves. Somebody bawled through amplifiers that he weighed one hundred and ninety-four pounds. He stood up and nodded again and his white teeth flashed. *"Darling,"* thought Diane.

Her handkerchief was torn and mangled.

Shortly Nick got up once more, his bathrobe still upon his shoulders, and moved to the center of the ring, and he and Schiller and the squat referee conferred. Lengthily.

"Well, come on," Norman kept saying in a bored voice. "Get going."

They returned to their corners. Ready hands plucked away Nick's bathrobe, and he stood bare of torso, statuesque, with sun-bronzed skin—beautiful and terrible to see. For a throbbing split-second he looked

straight at Diane, and faintly, rather wistfully, smiled. "Don't mind," he seemed to say. "Please. Please." She almost thought she heard him say it, only for her ears, below the thunder.

Then his whole face rearranged itself, and he was frowning, his jaw set firm, his black brows pulled together. He grasped the ropes and trotted where he stood, rubbing his shoe soles in the rosin. And a sharp gong sounded, and the lights went down——

Diane, fingers gripping, saw her lover whirl and spring; and then she saw a savage in his body. It happened just as suddenly and shockingly as that. Nick had been there, but he was gone. Instead of him there was a fiend with Nick's blond hair, a maniac that bared Nick's clenched white teeth and glinted cruelly out of eyes that were Nick's eyes and yet were not. He would kill the other snarling, lashing human thing. He would batter him and flay him till he died. This was no boxing-match for money; this was blood lust, fundamental. The watchers in the jungle gloom made strange fierce guttural tumult. Civilization had slipped back a million years.

It took her with it. Diane Withrow in her rich imported clothes turned savage with the tribe—for just three minutes. She had a sense of having shed all but the very marrow of her; of being for once, for just this one time, *raw*. She gloried in it. Avidly she watched the battle, sometimes frightened, sometimes trembling; but sickened or revolted never once. Not even when the gush of scarlet came from Schiller's mouth. Not

even when he fell and took a count of nine, and Nick stood waiting, wolfish, pitiless, for him to rise.

The first round ended. The lights shot up, the Stadium grew real again around her, the typewriters and telegraph instruments beat against her ear-drums like a flurry of big hailstones upon tin. Norman beside her said, "Well, *that* one certainly was Rambeau's!"—and Diane, letting out held breath in one sharp sigh, returned to sanity and cognizance. Her hands relaxed. She leaned against the seat-back. And all at once she knew that not again in all her life would there be such a crack as there had been just now in the lacquered shining shell in which she lived.

"I went mad," she said succinctly when Norman asked her what she had thought of it.

The madness had passed. She was herself now. Herself, a little limp and faint. She gazed up at Nick. He was sitting on the stool in his corner, and his men were working on him. His naked back was wet with sweat. Here and there upon him, on his shoulders, on his ribs, the sunburned skin was stung to angry red. He turned his profile slightly and spat on the canvas flooring. His tawny hair was matted on his forehead.

Something small and chill in Diane's mind said, "Look. This is your Nick. Look well."

"I—wish I hadn't come," she heard herself murmur.

Norman's puffy eyes focussed on her. "Too much for you?"

"A little. All of a sudden."

"We'll go if you like."

But she could not go. She shook her head. "No. I—not yet, anyway." She still looked at Nick, and tried to analyze and balance her new and curious conflict of emotions. She was fascinated. She was repelled. She adored him. She despised him. She wanted to climb up and put her arms around him. She would not have touched him—now—for anything.

The something in her mind said clearly, "*This* is why he didn't want you to come. He was afraid of this. See, he was right."

The gong for the second round roused her not at all. She did not even straighten in her seat. Her mind and sight felt sluggish, impercipient; the whole round was a movie reel of motion without meaning, a colored movie reel run off too fast. Just once it caught: there was a "still" of Nick against the ropes and Schiller, bull head low, beating upon him. The crowd howled, and a Schiller fan three seats away from Diane leaped to his feet and screamed to Nick to "write a pome about *that!*" . . .

A momentary catch; then Nick got free, and the reel went on.

The third round was the same. And the fourth. And the fifth. Kaleidoscopes, confused and disconnected. The blood was flowing freely now from Schiller's nose and mouth, and Nick's face was split below the cheekbone. Their bodies were bright pink; their breathing heaved their chests like bellows; they squinted through dangling strings of hair at one another. Endlessly they clinched, they crouched and circled, stealthy-

footed; their gloves were hammers, driving spikes of pain.

Twice Schiller fell, and lay, and struggled up again —in time. Once Nick went down, and over all the Stadium the people rose in one vast panicked wave. But he had slipped. An accident. Before they could start counting, he was back at the kill, more merciless, insensate, than before. Smashing at the face that was so crushed and cut already. Pounding at the ribs that were so sore.

"They ought to stop it," Diane thought. "They ought to make him stop. Oh, why do they *let* him? Nick!"

And all the while, the something in her mind kept nudging her, softly, slyly telling her things. "Look. This is a pugilist. You didn't realize, did you? It's just as well you came. It's—just as—well——"

She said to Norman, "Please. I want to go now. I—don't think I can stand it any longer."

Norman's eyes below the puffy lids were sympathetic, searching hers. He rose at once; his legs were a little unsteady, but he was courtly still, as he would be always. "Of course," he said. "By all means. You should have told me sooner."

Somehow they got out, wading shoulder-deep in turbulent seas of hats and faces. This was during the sixth round. It was only a question of seconds now before Schiller would fall again, and this time lie quite still, and know no more. The crowd felt that. Their hot eyes strained for it. They saved their breath,

and there was over all that place a hush, like the dead calm between great claps of thunder.

At the exit Diane glanced back over her shoulder for an instant. Patterns on a lantern in a pit. . . .

In the limousine she cried very miserably, for rather a long time. "Nerves," Norman said. "Just nerves."

He put his arm around her, and patted her shoulder with his gentle blue-veined hand. "There, there. It's all my fault. I shouldn't have taken you. I ought to have known."

He talked on, soothingly. But Diane did not hear. He kissed her, but she scarcely was aware. There would be time for Norman later. And her life would be for Norman. So she sobbed and did not heed him, thinking, "What a snob I am! What a *coward* I am! Oh, Nick—my darling——"

"ALL THE KING'S HORSES"

"ALL THE KING'S HORSES"

IN Hollywood there are pepper trees and palm trees. There are ermine coats and murmuring limousines. There are fairy story houses perched on green toy hills, gay and fanciful houses of pastel pink and buff with awnings like gay-colored scarfs; white stucco houses with red velvet poinsettias making Christmas card designs against their walls. Avocados grow in Hollywood, and very many flowers, and oranges, round tinted globes that look as though they should be lit at night, and chubby children. And the sunshine is balmier there, and the blue sky is bluer, and the blond hair is more giltly blond than you will ever find it anywhere else in all the world.

The first time little Jean Jenny looked upon this vivid town, she said, "Oooh!" Just that, on a long enchanted breath.

A year later she wasn't saying anything about it, much. She was keeping her petal mouth rather grimly closed, as though the less said the better; and she was frowning rather often, grooving the bridge of her small nose with two vertical lines, like the lines down a dollar mark.

From which you may conclude that little Jean Jenny was of those who find the beauty of Hollywood only skin-deep.

She had gone there, in the first place, to be a movie star. She had gone with a diploma from a high school somewhere in Nevada; a small, old trunk full of new, wrong clothes; a pamphlet on the art of make-up; and a dozen or more glossy print photographs of people who were movie stars already. Autographed. "Very sincerely yours, Norma Talmadge." "Yours very sincerely, Harold Lloyd."

Other possessions had been one hundred and fifty dollars; and a letter from the editor of the somewhere-in-Nevada *Daily Journal,* to the effect that the bearer had won by an impressive majority "a recent beauty contest sponsored by this newspaper." Little Jean Jenny has the letter still, and the clippings that were enclosed. Somewhat tattered and sadly soiled, as if a hundred heedless underling hands had dealt impatiently, irreverently, with them, letter and clippings lie buried deep in her lowest bureau drawer. Occasionally, burrowing down through layers of faded undies, she comes upon them, and smiles faintly. But only faintly.

There are two stories of little Jean Jenny in Hollywood. One is a story of failure. The title of it is "Nothing To-day," and the scene is a casting office, any casting office, and the villain is a casting director, any casting director.

The other story is this one. This love story.

If you drive away from Hollywood in a certain direction for a certain distance you see, on your right, a sign which reads, "Balboa Productions, Inc." Below

the sign is the gate of a walled city. A city with streets, and bungalows, and offices, and big and lesser buildings. Balboa City. Here little Jean Jenny worked. Here Grant Kincaid smiled and strutted and made his prince's living.

Grant Kincaid was a star. He was the bright particular star of Balboa Productions, Inc. The first little bungalow you came to, the one with the vines and the thick silk curtains, was his dressing room. The Great German Director was his director. He owned the most magnificent motor car in the studio parking space. He had sat for the largest of all the very large portraits of stars that hung on the walls of the studio restaurant, where little Jean Jenny worked.

She was a waitress. It was better, she had resolved at last, to be a waitress steadily than an actress (in a mob scene) once in a while. Well, not *better,* of course. But safer. You were not as happy; but you were not as hungry, and you slept more soundly of nights.

The Balboa studio restaurant was a big, bare, clattering place, a paper-napkin, dip-your-doughnut sort of place. It had paintless plaster walls, and worn green tables, scores of tables, and a grim cashier in a tall glass coop. It smelled parboiled. A cinema fan with sentiment and a sense of the fitness of things, observing it and sniffing it, would have wept to think that Lilli La Rue, for instance, lunched there—Lilli, who looked as if a diet of rose leaves and dew would overfeed her, and a breath of kitchen steam wilt her away. Alas for illusion! Lilli lunched there, with complacence and

with appetite. Grant Kincaid, Roy Logan, Beryl Frank—these and a dozen other Balboa stars and several hundred satellites all lunched there. Daily between twelve and two they came strolling in, wearing their make-up and their costumes; and they said to little Jean Jenny, "Chicken salad, and hurry," or they said to her, "The number three luncheon, please, and hurry." They were not always rushed, these studio people, but they always seemed convinced that they were.

I do not know exactly why I call her "little" Jean Jenny. She stood five feet four without any heels, and weighed almost as much as the weighing machines said she should. Yet the diminutive persists. It must be that her personality was little; innocent and trustful and young. You wanted to protect her. You wanted to adopt her. She talked in a breathless little-girl way, and eyed you with wide, dark shining eyes . . . and you wanted to rush out and buy her a doll and a book about Christopher Robin. . . .

She was very pretty. Of course, a pretty girl in Hollywood—well, you know. Another Nash. But in the restaurant she was noticeable, conspicuous, because she was the very prettiest waitress. People eyed her. Men's glances followed appraisingly her slim departing back, and their voices were less brusque, more buttery, when she returned.

Sometimes they told her that she ought to get herself a job in pictures. . . .

There were men who daily headed for one of her

four tables; who seemed annoyed if, as often happened, all of the four were already taken. There was a camera man whose name she didn't know, and his assistant, named Rabinowitz, nicknamed Rabbit. There was a polite quiet man with silvered hair who read a paper. There was Keable, the comedian, and somebody called Al from the publicity department, and Donald Wright, who played juvenile leads and always had at least two little ladies in tow.

There was Grant Kincaid.

The first time she ever waited upon him, it was to thought accompaniment something like this: "It's *him.* Right here. I could touch him, I could touch his hair. (One cream of tomato soup.) Isn't it funny, his eyes look black on the screen, but they're really blue. I wish he'd look up. (Lamb chops, baked potato.) Soldier's uniform. He must still be making 'Squads Right.' Isn't he wonderful in soldier's uniform? (Avocado salad and coffee.) Wonder where Miss La Rue is today? He usually eats with her, at that corner table. I don't think he likes her though. She's just his leading woman. (No cream with the coffee.) Darn it, isn't he *ever* going to look up?"

She brought him tea instead of coffee, forgot the bread, and broke a plate. He said in a surly tone, "Coffee, I told you. Black coffee." He said tersely, wearily, "Bread." Impersonal commands, addressed to her hands. . . . But when the plate crashed to the floor beside his chair, he looked at her. Really looked. Really at her. His eyes, which had lifted to glare

disapproval, stayed lifted to register interest and slight surprise. He stopped chewing. "Hello," he said.

"H-hello," she echoed.

They were indeed blue, the eyes. Deep, dark blue. The color of the corner of the flag.

"You dropped something," he observed, smiling.

"I know. I'm sorry. Did it—hit you?"

He shook his head, still smiling. That famous slanted smile.

Little Jean Jenny smiled back. Then she reddened, and hurriedly bent down and picked up the pieces of the plate. "I'll get you another."

When she reached the kitchen her face was so rosy that Minnie Newburgher, who presided over the stacked white dishes, said, "For land's sake, Jean, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"You're as red's a beet!"

"It's warm out there today," said little Jean Jenny. "Awfully warm and stuffy. Worse than here."

But she could not get back out there fast enough.

After that there were two kinds of days. Good and bad. Ecstatic and most miserable. The days when he sat at the table in the far-off corner with Lilli La Rue, and the days when he came to little Jean Jenny's table. Of course, there were Sundays, and there was that week he was at Catalina on location; but those weren't days, they were simply ciphers.

He usually appeared about one o'clock, a tall, lithe figure in tan army breeches, gleaming brown boots,

imported shirt. Little Jean Jenny, having pretended not to watch the door since twelve, now pretended that she didn't even know there was a door. She turned her back. She became very busy about her tables, filling glasses, flicking crumbs, inclining to customers ears that heard them not.

"Hello, gorgeous!" That was his invariable greeting. Lightly he tossed her that word, that shining bauble, to hug to her heart.

Sometimes during his meal he was preoccupied. Sometimes he was in a hurry. But *some*times they talked. He would say, "Hot, isn't it?" or "Are they keeping you busy?" or "What a morning I've had!" And then they would talk. Or rather, he would talk, and she would smile and nod and worship him.

He told her about the picture he was making, and the money the company was making on his last picture, and the story they had purchased for his next; about his new house in Beverly Hills— "You must come and see it, you'll like it"; and about his ex-wife's vaudeville tour, which, it appeared, was a success because and only because she was billed as "Mrs. Grant Kincaid." He mentioned parties, personalities; recited incidents, and relayed scandals. He described New York. *"That's* my town! You can have your blasted oranges and sunshine!"

One day, when he had lunched so late that they were almost alone in the restaurant before he finished, he became expansive, reminiscent. Through the smoke of a Russian cigarette he told her the tale of his life.

"My family were old Southern stock, you see, and when they found out that I wanted to be an actor—well!"

And once in a while, just every now and then, he tossed her another bauble. A word. A certain sort of glance. A little caressing phrase, low-spoken. A compliment. She treasured them all. She strung them together, gave them sequence and sincerity and depth. Often at night before she slept she whispered them over. "Darling." "I think you're awfully sweet, d'you know it?" "You know, honey, I love to talk to you and tell you things." "Listen, stop giving that fathead Keable so much time! Want to make me jealous?"

She would go to sleep smiling. . . .

She was a child, remember. You must please remember that.

Once Minnie Newburgher, coming unheralded upon her in the kitchen, found her trying the effect of a twist of tinfoil on her third left-hand finger.

"Well!" cried Minnie. "Well, well, *well!* What's his name?"

"Wh-whose name?"

Minnie pointed at the twist of tinfoil. It was now a tiny pill of tinfoil, wadded tight in little Jean Jenny's hand. "Don't try to kid *me!*" beamed Minnie. "I saw what I saw. Tell me, who is he?"

"Nobody you know."

"I'll bet I do! I may not know him, but I've seen him plenty—the redheaded boy that comes for you in the flivver! That's who it is, I'll bet, isn't it, hmm?"

Minnie's guess was not unreasonable. A redheaded boy did often come in a flivver for little Jean Jenny. His name was Bill. He was freckled, and Irish, and nice, and painfully in love. But——

"Him!" said little Jean Jenny. And she shrugged like Lilli La Rue. "Well, I guess *not!*"

The Grant Kincaid unit finished shooting "Squads Right" on a bright blue and gold August day. They went without luncheon, working straight through until four in the afternoon. Then they straggled into the restaurant, weary and starved, but jubilant. The director. The director's aides. The camera man, the electricians, the musicians, the scenarists, the script girl. And the players. Kincaid with his whipcord breeches and glowing leather boots. La Rue as a dashing French *cocotte*. Old Herbert Weatherbee, famous old clown, wearing a colonel's eagles on his shoulders and a hero's medals on his breast. Extra men in uniform, extra girls as nurses, peasants, nuns. Dozens, scores, of players, their faces grotesque in masks of yellow make-up slit with red.

Kincaid came in latest of all. Miss La Rue's ivory arm flashed high to attract his attention; she patted the back of an empty chair beside her own chair, and beckoned with her gay gilt head. Kincaid went.

Little Jean Jenny, thirty feet away, busily serving soldiers who had never fought and nuns who smoked cork-tipped cigarettes, kept an eye on him. She saw him talking. Addressing the table at large very earn-

estly, his arms folded where his plate should have been, his classic dark head thrust forward. She watched him laugh, lean back and lift his chin and laugh, as though life was good.

His table was almost the last to leave; and even when his companions had left, he lingered, lounging low in his chair, sipping coffee. Little Jean Jenny, still violently busy, although all her tables were vacant now, felt his eyes.

A moment later she head the tread of the glowing boots behind her. Fingers tweaked the streamers of the narrow voile ruffle she wore tied tight around her head.

"Hello, gorgeous!"

"Oh—hello there," she answered, over her shoulder.

She was picking crumpled paper napkins from one of her tables, gathering them with both small hands.

"How's my girl today?"

"Have you a girl?" inquired little Jean Jenny demurely.

"Haven't I?" he laughed. "It's for you to say."

He reached beyond her and pulled out a chair and bestowed his superb self upon it. "Well, he said, "we're through. Thirteen weeks, and now it's finished. And it's a masterpiece!" His eyes shone. "I tell you, it's the best thing I've done!"

"I can't wait to see it," she said softly.

She was standing motionless now, holding the wadded papers, two tight fistfuls. Kincaid looked at her. "Sit down," he suggested. "Can't you? You haven't

anything to do; everybody's gone. Sit down here a minute, and talk to me."

Little Jean Jenny sat down. They smiled at each other.

Kincaid lit a cigarette and blew a thin horn of smoke. "How are you?" he asked.

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"Tired. Dog-tired." He laughed shortly. "*Am* I! If I'd had to wait another day for this vacation——" He broke off. "I told you about my trip, didn't I?"

"Your—trip? You're going away?"

For answer he pulled a wallet from his hip pocket and from the wallet drew long strips of green and pink tickets, and handed them to little Jean Jenny. Dully she stared. Vaguely she saw black printed words. "Los Angeles." "Albuquerque." "Chicago." "New York, N. Y."

She heard his voice again. His exultant voice. "—be gone about two months. I asked for three, but they want to start shooting 'Infatuation' the first of October, so two is all I'm going to get. First I thought I'd pop over to Paris again. But I changed my mind. Little old New York is good enough for me."

She said, her eyes on the tickets, "August third. That's—you're going tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, yes."

She could not lift her eyes. Not yet. She continued to look at the tickets, although they grew blurry and blurrier until she couldn't really see them any more.

"Why don't you come with me? I've got two

tickets," he went gayly on. "I had to buy two, to get a drawing room—and it's a shame to let one of them go to waste, don't you think so?" He picked up the tickets, and himself regarded them. " 'Drawing room A, car 268,' on the Chief——"

He hesitated, and little Jean Jenny, sensing that his smile was gone, his levity banished, suddenly almost couldn't breathe for listening. But all he said was, "Say, that Chief's a great train! Los Angeles to New York in sixty-three hours, just imagine."

A moment later, in the midst of an account of his first coast-to-coast journey, years ago, he interrupted himself to exclaim, "Why—you're crying!"

She shook her head wordlessly.

"But you *are* crying!" his hand shot out and covered her hand, and clenched it. "There's a tear on each cheek. And there comes another one!"

"I—" she began. "I——"

"Look at me," said Grant Kincaid.

She shook her head again.

"Look at me, Jean."

Slowly her damp starry lashes lifted. She looked at him.

"Sweet little thing," he murmured, after quite a long while. And then, "You're crying because I'm going away. Aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You care about me—a little bit?"

She nodded, eyes on his.

He released her hand and stood up abruptly. There

was the whole six feet of him, the tapering breadth of him, the grace of him.

"What time," he asked quietly, "will you be through here?"

"As soon as I get my tables cleared."

He collected the tickets that lay on the table, and folded them, and tucked them into his wallet again. He restored the wallet to his hip pocket, shoving it in deep. He put his hands on the back of his chair and set it closer to the table and stood behind it, grasping it still. His eyes returned to little Jean Jenny's eyes. Held them. Hypnotized them.

"You know my car?"

Of course. Who didn't know that car, that glittering cradle?

"When you're through," said Grant Kincaid, "suppose you go over to the parking place and get in it."

So when she was through she went, and got in it.

The landlady was gray and drab and musty, like her house. In the morning light she was especially gray, especially drab; a gaunt, grim woman in a gingham Mother Hubbard, a woman who had forgotten all the lovely things of life, the color, and the starlight, and the flame.

"I will *not* have it," said the landlady for the seventh time.

"People who live in my house," she declared, "are respectable people. And respectable people—" She fixed a chill pale eye on little Jean Jenny "—don't come

wanderin' in at any such hour as this, without any good excuse at all. Do you know," inquired she, "by any chance, what time it is?"

"It's about seven, isn't it?"

"It's a quarter of nine! *A. M.!*"

"Is it," murmured little Jean Jenny, "really?"

The landlady, snorting, threw wide the door, which hitherto she had held only slightly ajar. "You can pack your things," she said. "And you can go. This is a——"

"Respectable house," supplied little Jean Jenny, nodding. She smiled sympathetically, sweetly, at the landlady. "I wasn't going to argue, Mrs. Bowen," she assured her. "I just came home to pack, anyway. You see, I'm leaving for New York this afternoon."

Packing took only an hour or two. Her possessions were few, and of these more than half went on the pile to be discarded. She sang as she packed, soft fragments of song, and once she laughed. She was going to New York. To *New York!*

She thought. "I really haven't been invited! Except for what he said in the restaurant, just kidding, he really hasn't asked me to go!" And then she laughed aloud, delightedly, because the idea that an invitation was necessary—now—was so preposterous. "He thought he'd see me this morning, of course," she told herself.

She wondered amusedly what he would think when he woke and discovered that she had flown. She pictured him telephoning wildly here and there and every-

where . . . and finding her at last when he boarded the train.

"Drawing room A, car 268," she chanted.

It was fun to call the restaurant at one o'clock, when things were busiest there, and say to the manager, whom she had never liked, "This is Jean Jenny. I'm not coming in today. No. Yes, I'm perfectly well, but —no, not tomorrow either. I'm afraid I won't be in any more at all, Mr. Saks. You see, I'm leaving for New York this afternoon."

She tried to call Bill, the faithful, the forsaken; but once the line was busy, and all the other times she lost her courage. In the end she wrote him a note. "Dear Bill," said the note. "This is to tell you that I'm engaged—" (She chewed her pen a little over that word. Nothing had been said about anything like that —oh, but everything was understood! She let it stand.) "—to somebody I love very much, and by the time you get this I will have left for New York on our honeymoon. I'm sorry if you are going to feel bad but know you will meet somebody much nicer soon and be very happy as I am. I am going to leave that class pin you gave me with Mrs. Bowen and you can get it from her. Please don't be mad at me. Very truly yours, Jean."

Then the bank. It wasn't a bank really, it was only a widowed silk stocking, of the hue known as atmosphere; but it yielded savings upon demand, in a bankish way.

Sitting cross-legged on Mrs. Bowen's floor, with her hat on and her baggage locked and strapped

nearby, little Jean Jenny counted her money. Ninety-seven dollars and twenty-three cents. It was all she had. It seemed a fortune.

She took her trunk to the station in a taxicab, and left it there. There was a little trouble about it.

"Where's your tickets?" said the baggage man.

"The—the other person has them."

"When's she gonna show up with 'em?"

"He," said little Jean Jenny severely. "Why, around train time, I imagine."

"See me then," said the baggage man, turning. And he added aggrievedly over his shoulder, "I can't check a trunk to N'Yawk on air, you know, lady."

Little Jean Jenny taxied back to the shopping district. She had four hours, and ninety-seven dollars.

She bought a dress, and two hats, and a pair of shoes, and some foolish, frothy underthings. And a present for Grant. A Japanese match box, black and gold and flattened to fit neatly in a pocket. It elated her curiously to buy him this, with her own money, money that she had made. It wasn't much, of course—he had so much anyway—but maybe he would like it.

When she had finished shopping the fortune in her purse had dwindled to one bill and a little silver.

She got into another taxicab and rode to the station again. She had an hour exactly to wait.

She could not sit still very long, so she took to walking on the platform, up and down and up and down in the dulling late afternoon sun.

A girl in smart and costly gray, with a great fur

about her slender shoulders, passed, and all at once little Jean Jenny felt shabby, poor, in her little dress. She hastened to the rest room, carrying the suitcase, and changed to the new one just purchased; and for her crocheted hat she substituted a new hat, a tight blue felt with a pearl in the crown. The effect was good. She felt much better, and more joyous still.

When she emerged from the station again, the train was made up, and Grant Kincaid had arrived on the platform.

She spied him at once, the center of a little knot of gay, spectacular people, picture people, stars like himself. Six or seven girls and men stood about Grant, laughing and talking and seeming not to notice the open interest they created. Lilli La Rue had her arm hooked into Grant's, and when she laughed her eyes sought his.

Somewhat behind the group a pile of distinguished luggage was being attacked by a porter in a blue suit. Two by two he bore the pieces up the steps of the nearest car, the car with "268" in its window.

Little Jean Jenny watched, troubled.

"I don't know what I'm s'posed to do," she thought, "exactly."

Then Grant Kincaid wheeled and surveyed the platform, as if he was seeking someone; she took heart. "I will go down there," she said to herself, "and stand where he can see me."

At first she shyly didn't look at him. She held her profile toward him, and looked at the train. Nothing

happened. The talk and the laughter rippled on. She was close enough to hear whole speeches quite clearly. "Have you got that number I gave you, Grant? Be sure to give her a buzz, she's a swell kid." . . . "Where you going to stay, Grant? Ritz?" . . . Lilli La Rue's voice, silky and slow: "Send us a lot of post cards of the skyline, and all that."

But nothing happened.

She turned her head and faced him squarely. He was looking at her. For an instant she read recognition, writ plain in his eyes. Then he looked away.

Little Jean Jenny stared at the train again. The black still train.

"He doesn't want them all to know——" she thought.

Presently she turned her head a second time. He had left the group. He was off at one side, speaking in low, furtive tones to the porter. The porter was nodding. "Now!" thought little Jean Jenny, suddenly mad with relief. "Now the porter will come, and tell me——"

And after another wait, a third survey of the flanks of the train, the porter came.

"Please, miss," he said *sotto voce,* "will you step over here jus' a minute? I got a message, confidential——"

She moved quickly to a safe distance, the porter at her heels.

"Tell me," she said.

The porter's hand was fisted in his pocket. "The gen'l'man," he began, "Mr. ——"

"Yes, yes, I know who. Go on."

The porter's hand appeared, still fisted.

"He says to give you this——"

There was money in her fingers, all at once. A crisp and corpulent roll of money.

"It's five hundred dollars," said the porter with proper awe.

Little Jean Jenny said nothing.

"He says to tell you he is sorry," said the porter.

"*Very* sorry," said the porter.

"Oh," murmured little Jean Jenny.

There was a long pause.

"Well—" said the porter at last. And he turned to go.

"Wait!" said little Jean Jenny sharply.

Then she did the thing that for many months she was to be proud of, and sorry for. She put the roll of bills, unwrapped, uncounted, into the porter's pink-black hand. "Tell the gentleman," she said, "that you've been tipped for the trip."

She picked up her suitcase, and her hatbox, and her several packages. She said, "You're welcome," to the gibbering porter. She walked across the platform and around the corner of the station, chin high, never glancing back.

There were taxicabs at the other side. She stopped beside the nearest one. The driver was a driver who had driven her once before that day. He smiled. "Where to now?"

Little Jean Jenny halted with one foot on the run-

ning board. She looked at the taxi driver. At him, and through and beyond him, with wide startled eyes. Slowly her foot came down to the sidewalk again.

"I don't—know where," said little Jean Jenny.

"And where," asked the taxi driver's wife with interest, "did she go?"

The taxi driver shrugged. "Search me! She walked."

SILK HAT

SILK HAT

WITH a pass-key the superintendent unlocked the door, and they filed solemnly in: the detective, the man from the corporation that owned the house, and the superintendent. Through the foyer they went without pausing, their footsteps mute on the rug, and into the big bright living room beyond. Here they halted, in a row.

"Hm," said the detective. "Nice place he had."

The man from the corporation said nothing. His eyes jumped around, up and down. He fingered his hat. He had taken it off when he entered, not knowing quite why.

The superintendent began silently switching off lights. Though it was morning of a shiny day, every bulb in the room was burning.

"Left 'em on, didn't he?" the detective said. And added in a jocular way, "Sure. What'd *he* care!"

"Do you think——" the man from the corporation began, but stopped abruptly, startled into silence by the ring of the telephone.

It was somehow a shocking, a horrible sound.

The detective answered. "Hullo?" he said, and cleared his throat. "Hullo? Why, no, he— Who is this? Who? Oh. Oh, yeh. What'd you want to talk to

him about? What? Oh, I see. Well— Kemble's dead. Yeh, *dead.* That's right. Suicide. Yeh. Fished him out of the river early this morning. Been dead about four hours. This is Mahoney of Headquarters talking. Lissen: what do you know about him? Know who his relatives are, or——? Don't, hm. Did. I see. No. No, I can't say as to that." . . .

He hung up presently. "His tailor," he explained to the two who had listened. "Kemble's owed him for three suits since last April. *Sa-ay!* Who's the blonde?"

He referred to a photograph in a giant Italian leather frame which stood on the desk in the corner. A photograph of a woman not quite young, with strange sacrilegious eyes. A costly woman. You thought of shops. Avenue salons. "I will have this, and this." In the photograph her mouth was black, but you knew how red it would be. Her eyebrows were commas. She wore an evening gown and a rope of pearls, and in the pearls the fingers of one hand were twined, the slim first finger pointed up and curved a very little, as if she indicated herself.

"Not bad," said the detective. Unprofessionally.

"I've seen her," said the superintendent. "She's been here, many's the time."

"How old a fellow was Kemble?" asked the man from the corporation.

"Twenty-two, twenty-three, somewhere along there."

The man from the corporation stared harder at the picture.

"Know her name?" the detective queried of the superintendent. "She might give us the dope we need."

"No. I never heard her name."

"Well," said the detective, "let's get busy. I got other things to do today."

Suddenly brisk, he seated himself before the desk and pulled out the nearest drawer. It was choked with papers. "Here. Might be something here."

He removed the papers by handfuls and piled them on the desk, and began to go through them. They were chiefly bills. Huge bills, that made the superintendent's pale eyes bulge, and drew from the detective soft low whistles. Bills for food, for wine, for flowers, for garage rent, for a silk hat, for a jazz band. Bills marked "Please Remit" and "Overdue." Letters: "Your attention is respectfully called——" And other letters not so respectful.

"This guy," said the detective, "was cert'n'y a bird. Bought things like money grew on trees—and ain't paid a cent in six months. How was he about his rent?"

"Slow," replied the man from the corporation. "But we got it, up till last month."

"Leave it to you," the detective grinned. "You fellas get it—*or else!* How long's he had this place?"

"Eleven months."

"I remember when he come," put in the superintendent quickly, importantly. "I remember the day well. I shown him three apartments—this one, and two cheaper. He took this, and the next day he brought a decorator, and pretty soon the stuff began comin'.

All this stuff. All new, it was. Every bit of it brand new."

"And you don't know where he came from?" the detective asked. Hopefully, and for the fourth time.

They still didn't.

"All we need to find out is who to notify," reiterated the detective. "It don't take a Sherlock Holmes to guess why he did it." His fat hand slapped the bills.

"If there's anybody cares," he added.

He gathered up the bills and stuffed them back into their drawer, and yanked out the drawer below.

There was a checkbook; a bankbook; a stack of theater programs; a souvenir hammer from a night club; a box of stationery, engraved; a book on Good Manners. Below all these, thrust into the back of the drawer, were newspaper clippings, together with a telegram, held by a rubber band. "Here," said the detective.

The telegram tore a little when he pulled it from under the band, for it was worn, and weak along the creases. He spread it out on the desk; emitted a grunt of satisfaction. " 'Green Falls, Indiana,' eh?"

This was the message:

GEORGE KEMBLE
C/O WARREN'S GARAGE
GREEN FALLS, INDIANA.

TAKE GREAT PLEASURE IN INFORMING YOU THAT CONTEST PRIZE TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR BEST NAME OUR NEW CIGARETTE HAS BEEN AWARDED YOU BY THE JUDGES FOR YOUR

SUGGESTION "BUDDY" STOP OUR REPRESENTATIVE EN ROUTE TO YOU BEARING OUR CHECK AND OUR CONGRATULATIONS STOP RUSH PHOTOGRAPH AND DATA FOR PUBLICITY USE

(SIGNED) THE UNIVERSAL TOBACCO CO
T. M. SOMERS, PRESIDENT.

The date was a date not quite a year old.

"My God!" said the detective. "I've got a pack of 'em in my pocket right now!"

He exhibited it. Three pairs of eyes regarded it, awed.

They turned to the clippings. There were pictures of George Kemble, a smiling dark-haired boy. There were small-town large-type headlines like "Kemble Wins!" and "Local Lad Makes Fortune Over Night." There were paragraphs and paragraphs of facts. . . . George Kemble was twenty-two years old. His parents were deceased. He had been born and raised in Green Falls. At the age of seventeen he had left High School and associated himself in business with William H. Warren, proprietor of Warren's Garage, South Walnut Street, where he had rapidly become known as one of the best mechanics in Lane County. . . .

The detective returned to the telegram. He read and reread it again. "Twenty grand!" he kept saying. "Twen-ty *grand!* And *any* damn fool coulda thought of that!"

The man from the corporation had clippings in his hands. "Listen," he commanded, and his voice was

low and grave and compassionate. "Listen to t[illegible] 'Lucky' Kemble, as he is now called, today told [illegible] porters that he expected to leave for New York [illegible] as soon as possible. 'That's the town for people with money,'" he said.

There was a short silence.

"And he went through it," murmured the man from the corporation, "in half a year."

"And how!" the detective said. And he snorted. *"Silk hats!——"*

They opened the bankbook, which before they had passed over. There it was, the single entry: twenty thousand dollars, no cents. They opened the checkbook and glanced over it, marveling. Incredible that such a sum could shrink so swiftly, through stubs that, held together, were no thicker than a thumb!

"Well," said the detective finally, slamming the checkbook shut, "anyway. We got what we need. A wire to Green Falls, now——"

"Look here," interrupted the man from the corporation.

He had picked up a magazine lying on the desk, and parted its leaves at the place where a pencil and several sheets of rough paper were thrust in. Here was an announcement, an offer, screaming in red from a page. "$5,000.00 Cash for Ten Best Letters on 'Why I Prefer Lait's Shaving Cream.'" . . . The sheets of loose paper were covered with scrawled, half-hearted, short attempts to write such a letter. *"I prefer Lait's because"* (scratched out) *"It seems to me that*

ll the shaving-creams on the market" (scratched out). . . .

"Poor kid," said the man from the corporation softly.

The superintendent said nothing. His eyes were riveted on the red round printed ciphers. Three of them.

He was thinking that his wife, Mary, could write real good letters. . . .

The detective stood up, folding the telegram into his wallet. "Poor damn fool, I'd call him," he said. "He mighta known he couldn't repeat. Stands to reason."

"It looks," said the man from the corporation, "as though he did know."

The detective tucked his wallet into an inner pocket and buttoned his coat with stubby fingers. He turned to go. "What I can't see is," he said, "why, if he was such a hell of a good mechanic, he didn't get busy again and *be* a mechanic. Eh?"

The question was an observation, merely. The detective did not expect anyone to answer him. And no one did—unless you count the woman in the frame, whose slim first finger pointed up and curved a very little, as if she indicated herself.

PORTRAIT OF A MAIDEN AUNT

PORTRAIT OF A MAIDEN AUNT

CHASTE prim furnishings. Plain net curtains. Portraits in oil of pink-cheeked ancestors. Neat sets of Thackeray, Dickens, Emerson, Shakespeare and Carlyle, behind glass. Antimacassars; and two goldfish in a stony, mossy tank. All these things belonged to Miss Mathilda H. Meade. And she to them.

Miss Meade was thirty-nine. She was thin, with coat-hanger shoulders and surprising stout legs. She wore spectacles usually, and when she did not there was always a spectacle-mark between her brows and her faded blue eyes blinked and watered. Most of her dresses had little string belts which she tied too loose and too low, so that even when standing she gave an effect of sitting, as in a swing. In 1915 Mr. Hugh Leigh, of Havemeyer, Leigh & Boyd, New York, had peevishly said to his office manager, "Will you for heaven's sake find me a secretary who won't get *married!*" The office manager had found Miss Meade.

She was drab, she was negative, she looked a good deal like almost everyone else, and wore their sort of clothes—but there was about her one flashing, vivid thing: she was Bunny Meade's aunt. This was her personality. This colored and defined her, like sunset on a window glass. For Bunny was jaunty, and pic-

turesque; a play boy; a glamorous youth; and nobody could be the aunt of such a one and still be quite entirely *nobody*.

Bunny also lived in New York, though his parents lived in Rhode Island. He had a room and a bath in a club in the Thirties, East. Two years ago, when he came from college (by request, not by diploma), Miss Mathilda had offered him her guest room. Bunny had declined, on the ground that he wanted to live near the office "—if you know what I mean." Miss Mathilda had thought he meant he wanted to live near the office. She was not very perspicacious, that lady.

Bunny was twenty-two, and he did newspaper cartoons, and he had a great many friends. Miss Mathilda did not see him often. Sometimes she did not see him for a month. There was daily, however, the chance that she might see him or hear from him, and this made life pleasant, and doorbells and telephone-rings thrilling. She always kept his favorite cigarettes on hand; and every day, unconsciously, she ordered more dinner than she alone could possibly consume. . . .

When he appeared, it was heaven. He never stayed long, he usually borrowed money, he always spilled ashes in every direction; still it was heaven. Her mind on these occasions divided itself in two: a half that hung on his words, and a half that fretted and worried about his comfort. Wouldn't he like this chair? A cushion behind his back? A footstool? More matches? *Some*thing?

It was great fun to hear about his girls.

Not that she ever heard much about any of them; but he told her a little. She caught and cherished names. Barbara. Marian. Claire. She hearkened eagerly to, and strove to comprehend, certain cryptic descriptives. Barbara, it seemed, was just "a dim bulb." Marion was "rather neatly thrown together," but "how dumb!" Claire was the current favorite. Claire had everything. Bunny, by his own confession, was "plenty That Way" about Claire.

"Bring her to see me," Miss Mathilda begged, time and time again.

And once he did.

The visit was preceded by a telephone call. "Listen, Tilda: do me a favor, will you?"

"Oh, *yes!*" she said.

It developed that they had been to a football game that afternoon, Claire and Bunny; and that evening they were going to a dance. The dance was at Sherry's, a private affair, and it wouldn't break up till very late —too late for Claire to be driven back to her home far down Long Island. The hotels were crowded, and everything was in a jam, and *would* Tilda let Claire stay there with her, and dress there before the dance. They'd had their dinner——

This was at eight o'clock.

By eight-thirty the guest room had received its second thorough sweeping of the day; the massive mahogany guest room bed had been tenderly dressed in linens and woolens; six starched little towels of the

bridge-prize sort had been hung on the rack in the bathroom; and Miss Mathilda in new brown satin was doing a number of things at once, and praying that the doorbell would not ring till those and other things she kept thinking of to do were done.

It rang at five minutes of ten. One second later the knob was wrenched, and a half-second after that Bunny's fist beat a gay tattoo on the panel. *Knock! Knock-a-knock-knock!* Bang! BANG!

Miss Mathilda, giggling a little, adjusting with tremulous fingers the tiny string belt that was tied too low, scurried breathless to answer.

It was dim in the foyer, and she could not see Claire very well; but she felt her hand, little and firm, and heard her liquid tremulous voice: "How do you do, Miss Meade? This is so sweet of you——"

Bunny was exuberant. He hugged his aunt, a giant raccoon arm about her shoulders. "How are you?" he demanded. "Did you think we weren't coming? *How* long ago was it I called you? Listen! D'you know what happened? Tell her, Claire. You tell her. I choke."

"Well," said Claire, "first I spent an hour in a taxi in front of Bunny's club while he changed his clothes——"

"Not that!" interrupted Bunny. "I meant about the check. One of us," he gleefully explained to Miss Mathilda, "—chivalry forbids the mention of names, but *one* of us—lost the check! The check for Claire's suitcase. It was checked at Grand Central. Lord! What

a time! . . . Say, but why do we loiter in doorways, as it were?"

"Yes, come in," said Miss Mathilda suddenly, feverishly, "come in. I—I was so interested——"

She hurried ahead of them into the living room and circled in haste around it, pulling chairs forward an inch or two apiece. "Sit here, Miss—Miss Bruce. Sit down. Here, Bunny——"

"We can't," declared Bunny. "We're late now, and Claire's got to jump into a dress."

"Oh, not quite yet—" Miss Mathilda said. She said it absently. She was looking at Claire. Beaming at her, and blinking, her pale eyes moist with sentiment. Bunny's little sweetheart! How lovely she was! With tawny hair, and a small exquisite face, and a baby mouth. When she smiled her lashes smiled first, tangling at the corners. . . .

"Sit down just a *minute,*" Miss Mathilda pleaded. "Do."

So they sat down, albeit in attitudes markedly transient, on the edges of chairs. Claire loosened her coat. It had a huge fur collar, tugged somewhat to the left by a heavy clot of tired football-game violets. Beneath it the frock was tan and tight and very short indeed, and against the partial halo of the collar Claire's hat was tan also, and smart as a tiny hat can be.

"We're always late," observed Claire.

She drew off her gloves, finger by finger. "I always was," she continued, "and since I've known Bunny, I'm

later." She smiled at Miss Mathilda, confidentially. "I used to complain that I never saw a kickoff, or a rising curtain. Now I think I'm lucky if I get there at all."

"Now just exactly where," demanded Bunny, "haven't you *got?*"

"Oh—places."

"Isn't she beautiful, Tilda?" said Bunny unexpectedly.

Miss Mathilda, after a shocked glance at him, mumbled affirmatively.

"Beautiful," repeated Bunny, wagging his head.

"But is it art?" said Claire.

She swung one slim leg from the knee of its mate, idly surveyed the room, and seemed not to know that when one is flattered one ought to show confusion; seemed, indeed, not to know that she had been flattered.

"I hope I'm not a bother," she remarked to Miss Mathilda, "descending on you bag and baggage like this?"

"Oh, you're not! You're not at *all!*"

"It's so good of you to take me in——"

"I'm so *glad* to! Bunny has spoken of you so often——"

"And," said Bunny, "so feelingly."

He stood up. He moved toward Claire, and from his great height swooped down upon her, yanking her up by both wrists. "Come on, brat," he said. "Time you got going."

Miss Mathilda again protested, but vainly. "She

must, really," Bunny insisted. "It takes her forever to dress."

"That from you!" jeered Claire.

They conducted her into the guest room. Miss Mathilda went ahead, flutteringly, and Bunny brought up the rear with the suitcase.

"*And* the orchid?" queried Claire over her shoulder.

"And the orchid."

It was in a cardboard florist's box, and it was not an orchid but three orchids and some fern. Miss Mathilda, with permission, unpacked it reverently. "Ummm!" she exulted.

"Nice," said Claire.

Bunny had departed again. Claire pulled off her hat, carelessly, as a boy does. She hung it on one of the bedposts, where it looked indescribably waggish; and opened her suitcase. Miss Mathilda, wistful, hovered close.

"Can't I do something?"

"Thank you," Claire said. "I think I'll be all right——"

There were tortoise shell toilet articles in the tray of the suitcase, and there were earrings and powder puffs and pearls. And when Claire lifted the tray out and set it aside on the bed, there were glimpses of turquoise velvet, and cloth of silver, and pale chiffon.

"Well——" said Miss Mathilda. "If you need anything you'll call me, won't you?"

Claire promised she would, smiling sweetly if a trifle abstractedly; and Miss Mathilda pulled the window

shades lower, switched on the bathroom lights, and went out, closing the door.

She carried back to the living room with her, caught in the tail of her eye, the glint of a rhinestone heel on a silver sandal. . . .

Bunny was standing with his back to her. Tall he stood, statuesque, superb in his evening clothes, and moodily blew smoke into the goldfish tank. "All set?" he inquired, without turning.

"Oh, yes."

"Hope she hops to it. It's after ten."

In a minute he put out his cigarette, and stretched himself at full length in a chair. Locking his fingers behind his handsome head, he regarded the ceiling. "What's the financial situation, Tilda?"

"Why——"

"I'm flat," Bunny said succinctly. "As usual. If you could let me have twenty till pay-day——"

"Of course, dear."

Bunny hesitated. "Well—could you spare any *more* than twenty? This is a private party, but there're things—— How much've you got on hand, d'you know, Tilda?"

"Why—let's see——"

It was hard to concentrate. Her mind was dazzled still, and refused to dim itself to common things. "My pocketbook is in my room," she said finally. "I'll get it, in a minute."

"Before Claire comes back."

"Oh, yes."

She did not stir. After a time she said abruptly, ecstatically, "I can't *wait* to see how she's going to look!"

Bunny's expression was blank. "Look?"

"When she's all ready!"

"Oh," said Bunny. And then, "Oh, Claire always looks knock-out."

"I suppose——" Miss Mathilda began diffidently, "I suppose she wears evening dresses—quite often?"

She had been afraid it was a silly question, and Bunny's eyes assured her that it had been. "Naturally," he said.

"I suppose she has dozens?" Miss Mathilda flushed. Sillier and sillier. . . . But the idea of dozens of evening dresses, all subject to use, was so vastly exciting.

"I suppose so," said Bunny.

Miss Mathilda thought about it. Colors swirled in her mind. Lavender, orange, green. Red. Men were said to like red.

"Are——" She moistened her lips. "Are any young men—besides you—attentive to her?"

"Lord, yes!"

"Oh?"

"Fifty or sixty," Bunny said moodily. "We trip over each other."

Miss Mathilda pictured it. Fifty or sixty young six-footers, tripping over each other. . . .

Claire came out in a quarter of an hour. Sheathed snug in turquoise velvet, slung round with a silver-cloth

wrap, she entered the living room casually, matter-of-factly—as if to be so breath-taking were nothing, nothing at all. Light seemed to come with her, to shift as she moved. Perfume sighed all about her. Below her small left ear the three orchids curled and quivered, and one of a pair of pendant crystal earrings fell among them, like a great shining drop of dew.

"Bunny," she said, "I know how it always annoys you, but you'll simply *have* to put this make-up in your pocket——"

Miss Mathilda scarcely heard. She was all eyes. Eager, greedy eyes, devouring details.

"Because *I* haven't any place to carry it," said Claire.

"You wouldn't," Bunny sighed.

He accepted the several articles. Claire drew her wrap tighter about her slenderness and pinned it on one hip with both hands. She turned to Miss Mathilda; smiled her slow sweet smile. "Will you excuse us, Miss Meade? I s'pose we'd really better dash along."

Of course. Of course, they must.

"Don't wait up, Tilda," Bunny added. He had taken, among other things, her latchkey.

Miss Mathilda followed them to the door. "Good-by," she said. "Good-by. Have a lovely, *lovely* time——"

Even when they were gone, when the door had shut again, she still followed them in thought; and somehow she knew that outside in the deserted hall, before they rang for the elevator, Bunny kissed Claire quite fiercely, for rather a long time.

Miss Mathilda went back into the living room, and sat down.

She sat straight in her chair, not relaxing. Her hands lay loose in her lap, the palms upturned. They looked very empty.

It was quiet in the living room. The ghosts of Bunny's cigarettes hung blue and dim and quiet in the air. It was a little cold, too, Miss Mathilda noticed, and she wondered why she did not go to bed. Wondered dully, sitting there.

Bunny and Claire. Bunny and Claire. . . . *Why* was she suddenly thinking of Richard Whitacre? There was no connection. She had not thought of him for a long time. But he was in her mind now, superimposed upon Bunny and Claire. An old waltz tune that had been new when she was young was in her mind. A billow of white taffeta, rose-sprigged and trimmed with lace. A compliment heard twenty years ago. (Or yesterday?) Tall Richard. Where was he now?

"He's in New York," she said aloud, as if someone had asked her.

She knew that. It was all she knew.

Dark Richard, with dark soft eyes. He had wanted to marry her, once; and she had sent him away. She could not think why. "Because I don't love you," she had said. She remembered that—but it seemed an insufficient, flimsy reason. There was this loneliness. She thought she should have known then, who knew it now so well, that there would be this loneliness; that no one else would come, her whole life long.

Twenty years ago. She had not seen him for fifteen years. New York was big; as big as that. She had heard that he married, and that his young wife died, and once his name had leaped to her eyes from a newspaper. Richard M. Whitacre. Vice-president of something. A bank? A railroad? She could not recall. Something important—but not to her.

She sat there many minutes, and when she rose at last her body and her brain felt weary, heavy, ages old. "Bed," she said to herself. But there were things she must do first. Snap off lights. Put out milk bottles. Write a note to the milkman about extra cream.

She did these things, directing their performance half aloud; her tongue, lieutenant to her absent mind, gave orders. "See if there are eggs enough in the ice-box——" *How still it was!* In all this place, how solitary-still. Incredible that somewhere music moaned and crashed. Music for rhinestone heels. . . .

She came out of the kitchen, and moved through the dining-room and the inner hall, leaving them in darkness behind her. Light shone from the guest room ahead. She advanced to the threshhold; and there stopped, and stood motionless, gazing in.

Claire's room. In fifteen hurried minutes, Claire had made it hers, given it her fragrance, her careless charm. She had made it young. With cosmetics, with chiffons, with ostrich-feathered mules and one cigarette stub, red-stained at the tip, crushed in a china pin tray from which the pins were dumped, she had overcome the antique furnishings of the room, set them back into the

shadows of the dead past century that knew them first. Her hat still garnished a bedpost. The tan dress she had worn with it was flung on a high-backed chair. Little kicked-off shoes lay on their sides on a rag rug, and a negligée spilled color from the bed's edge to the floor.

Miss Mathilda looked and looked.

For a while she quite forgot that she had come to fold down the covers of Claire's bed; then she remembered, and went into the room. But not straight to the bedside. . . . That scarf of filmy yellow hanging on the bathroom door; was that a *night-gown?* She had to go and see.

It was. It couldn't be, but it was.

She inspected the bureau. There were the violets, dying in their tinfoil. And other things. Perfume. Gloves. A wrinkled tube like a toothpaste tube with green salve squeezing from it: "Brilliantine" it was marked. Jars, jewels, a wee black brush that had stained the bureau-cover, a pink plush powder puff the size of a plate. Also an eyelash curler that baffled Miss Mathilda. She had never heard of eyelash-curling.

She began, rather guiltily and fearfully at first, to touch things, to pick things up. First the violets, to smell them and to pity them. Then the black brush, to put it in its proper box. Then a jar. Then a lipstick. Then a tin that said "Eye shadow."

She found herself thinking, "Maybe she isn't so pretty *really*——"

A phrase that Bunny once had used of a girl in a

restaurant recurred to her: "A good paint job." [illegible] that was what Claire was. Maybe that was al[illegible] almost anyone, with aids like these——

Miss Mathilda's fingers, suddenly trembli[illegible] a box of rouge. Opened it. Rubbed the tiny pad on the round red cake.

In the mirror above the bureau she saw her hand come up; then, "Nonsense!" she cried sharply aloud, and put the pad back, and snapped the box shut, and dropped it.

Her face when she turned from the bureau was as red as rouge could have made it—all over.

She crossed to the bed. She was very brisk and business-like now. These things must be moved that littered the counterpane. This suitcase tray, from which most of the tortoise shell fittings had been taken. This negligée. This little rainbow pile of underwear, streaming pastel ribbons. She put them all on a chair, with hasty hands.

She grasped the suitcase, and would have moved it too; but something she glimpsed gave her pause.

She let go, and stood looking.

In the bottom of the suitcase lay another evening dress. A flashing one, made of silver sequins. You could tell that it was a brief dress because, folded just once, it fitted; and it was beautiful, beautiful. It had a huge pink rose that would rest on the hip, and the hem of it zigzagged in points. As an added touch, three particles of confetti were caught among the sequins on the little bodice. One scarlet, and two green.

"Last night," thought Miss Mathilda. There had been a football dance last night in a college gymnasium. Bunny had said so. She wanted to see the dress fully, so she told herself that it would muss in the suitcase, that she should take it out and hang it up for Claire. She took it out. By its shoulder pieces she lifted it and held it at arms' length from her. Then she held it against herself, over the new brown satin. She turned to the full-length mirror that was set in the closet door. Beautiful dress. Shimmering and radiant dress.

"It would fit me," she thought. "I'm slim."

She had always thought of herself as simply "skinny."

All at once she giggled nervously, laid the dress on the bed, and began to unfasten the new brown satin. Her fingers jerked at the snaps. Still giggling to herself in little quick exhalations of breath, she peeled the garment off, over her head, and stood in petticoat and corset cover. She scrutinized the dress. Too low. Too short. The corset cover must come off, and the petticoat.

While she donned the evening gown, she stood with her back to the mirror. She would not even peep until it was all on, and fastened. Then she would burst upon her own sight. . . . It was awfully exciting. This suspense. How would she look? What would the silver sequins do to her? They fitted tight, sheath-like, giving her a Figure. She pressed the palms of her hands along her sides. Nice and slim! Lovely and slim! So many people were fat at thir—— when they got a little older.

Her reflection, confronted at last, was rather disappointing. She stopped smiling when she faced it, and grew grave. The dress was all right. It was charming. It fitted her faultlessly. But below the pointed edges of the knee-length skirt were her heavy legs in dark brown hose. And above the bodice, above the bare white neck (her neck *was* white, as milky-white as Claire's, she proudly thought) the faded face in its scant rim of hair seemed not to belong. . . .

"I need make-up," she said to herself. Of course! Make-up made all the difference. "And light shoes and stockings," Miss Mathilda added in her mind. She was sanguine again. She was buoyant, gay. She had looked too soon, that was all.

There were slippers of Claire's on a table but a glance at them told her they would not fit. She ran into her own room, across the little hall, and returned bearing gray kid shoes with Baby Louis heels, and stockings to match. Sitting on the high edge of Claire's bed, she substituted these for the brown. "They're not very evening-y—but I just want to get the effect——"

She laid the discarded footwear with the brown dress on the bed, so that in departing she would surely leave nothing behind.

"*There!* Now, my hair——"

Her hair had long been bobbed, for convenience' sake; she habitually wore it bound with a net. To remove the net and brush the flat locks into fluffiness was the work of a very few minutes—and took years from her face. The ends needed curling. She curled them in

the kitchen, heating an ancient iron she had dug out of a drawer on one of the burners of the stove.

"Now, make-up!"

Claire's bureau again. Claire's powder, a heavy layer. Claire's lipstick, rubbed hard along thin bloodless lips that could scarcely control their quivering. Claire's rouge, in bright circles. Miss Mathilda was not ashamed any more, she did not snort, "Nonsense!," nor think it. She was not Miss Mathilda. She was someone like Claire, preparing to go somewhere.

She daubed perfume on herself. She screwed on earrings, slipped on pearls. She penciled her eyebrows gingerly, and attempted to blacken her lashes, but gave it up when her eyes began to water and to smart. The eye shadow, the lash-curler and the brilliantine she passed over, not knowing what to do with them exactly. Was there anything else?

She looked, not at her image, but at the bureau-top. No. There wasn't. She had used everything.

"Now!"

Back to the full length mirror. She put one hand on her hip, as she had seen models do, and walked to within a foot of it, and halted. Her eyes were squeezed shut. She drew a deep breath, and opened them—then let the breath out in a single, almost frightened gasp. It was too marvelous! It was *too marvelous!*

She stood there a long time. Her eyes dilated, feverbright; the rise and fall of the sequins that spanned her flat chest quickened, as if she had been running hard. Once she laughed aloud, joyously. Once she put

light tentative hands to her face, as if to assure herself that it *was* hers—that suddenly magically fair and vivid face with the actress's mouth. There was in her no glad realization that she could do this again, there was no regret that she had not done it before. There was only this moment, this high bliss.

She thought, "I wish Claire could see me——"

She had forgotten everything was Claire's.

"And Bunny!" How she wished Bunny were here! How his dark eyes would widen! She could visualize it, she could hear him cry out, "Why, *Tilda!* What in the—why, you're *beautiful!*" He would turn to Claire. "Isn't she beautiful, Claire?" And Claire would agree. And they would say, "Come on, get your wrap. You're going to this dance with us!"

To the looking-glass Miss Mathilda shook her head gently, smilingly. "I can't," she told it. "You're dears to want me, but—I can't tonight." She blushed a trifle. "You see—Richard Whitacre is coming to call."

She appeared to listen then, as if the mirror were talking. She blushed more, and simpered, blinking her lashes. "Oh, now, Bunny! You're such a tease!——"

Abruptly she abandoned the little game. Her eyes thought into the glass. Thought hard. And a new light dawned in them. Why not? *Why not?*

The telephone directory of Manhattan and the Bronx contained no Richard Whitacre. For an instant this was tragedy, stark, intolerable. Then she breathed again. Suburban! Of course. A great house with trees and lawns around it. . . .

She found him in the suburban book, near the back of it. ("Whitacre, Richard M, res. Grenwch.") Her finger was white at the knuckle, marking the name. Greenwich. Not far. Not terribly far. He wouldn't mind coming into town, driving in his limousine. It wasn't so late. For auld lang syne he would come—*and when he saw her*——

Her hand shook, holding the receiver. Her voice when she gave his number was not her voice. She had to give the number twice. Stupid operator. And so slow. Was she ringing? "Operator!" (Click-click-click-click on the hook.) "Operator, are you ringing Gre——"

"I am tuh-ryy-ing to get them."

A man's voice answered, finally. "Yes?"

"Richard?" she said.

Her mind had leaped preliminaries. It was impossible that this was not he.

"Mr. Whitacre," said the voice on a slightly reproving note, "is not here."

(Impossible. Impossible.)

"Who is this, please?" added the voice.

"Not—there?" Miss Mathilda spoke difficultly. Her lips were dry.

"No, madam. Who is this, please?"

"This—this is Miss Meade—an old friend——"

The voice warmed a degree or so. "I'm very sorry, Miss Meade. Mr. Whitacre is in Chicago. Would you like to speak with Mrs. Whitacre?"

(With *whom?*)

It was a full half minute before Miss Mathilda understood. "No!" she said then. "Thank you, no, I——"

She hung up the receiver. She could not, for the life of her, have said another word.

She leaned against the wall. Tired. So horribly tired, she almost could not bear her own weight. "Mrs. Whitacre." "Would you like to speak with *Mrs.* Whitacre?" Oh, God, *who?* Why, his wife. Richard's wife. He was married again. She, Mathilda, had nothing again. Nothing in all the world. Nothing.

Even the thing she never had had was gone. She could no longer hug it to her heart.

She went back into Claire's room, and stood before the mirror, and stared at herself. And now she saw. She saw a caricature. She saw a comic valentine. She saw a painted, bedizened old maid in a débutante's dancing dress.

"Oh——" chokingly, "you *fool*——"

She wheeled from the glass. Tight-lipped, tears hot upon her cheeks, she tore off the silver sequin gown, not caring if she damaged it. What would it matter if she did? Claire had dozens of dresses. Claire had dozens of dancing dresses, and fifty or sixty young men. . . .

Lying in her narrow white bed a little later, wide-eyed and calm now in the quiet dark, Miss Mathilda decided quite suddenly and very positively that she did not approve of Claire, she did not approve of her at all, and that, in the morning, she would have to tell Bunny so.

NIGHT CLUB

NIGHT CLUB

PROMPTLY at quarter of ten P.M. Mrs. Brady descended the steps of the Elevated. She purchased from the newsdealer in the cubbyhole beneath them a next month's magazine and a tomorrow morning's paper and, with these tucked under one plump arm, she walked. She walked two blocks north on Sixth Avenue; turned and went west. But not far west. Westward half a block only, to the place where the gay green awning marked "Club Français" paints a stripe of shade across the glimmering sidewalk. Under this awning Mrs. Brady halted briefly, to remark to the six-foot doorman that it looked like rain and to await his performance of his professional duty. When the small green door yawned open, she sighed deeply and plodded in.

The foyer was a blackness, an airless velvet blackness like the inside of a jeweler's box. Four drum-shaped lamps of golden silk suspended from the ceiling gave it light (a very little) and formed the jewels: gold signets, those, or cuff-links for a giant. At the far end of the foyer there were black stairs, faintly dusty, rippling upward toward an amber radiance. Mrs. Brady approached and ponderously mounted the stairs, clinging with one fist to the mangy velvet rope that railed their edge.

From the top, Miss Lena Levin observed the ascent. Miss Levin was the checkroom girl. She had dark-at-the-roots blond hair and slender hips upon which, in moments of leisure, she wore her hands, like buckles of ivory loosely attached.

This was a moment of leisure. Miss Levin waited behind her counter. Row upon row of hooks, empty as yet, and seeming to beckon—wee curved fingers of iron—waited behind her.

"Late," said Miss Levin, "again."

"Go wan!" said Mrs. Brady. "It's only ten to ten. *Whew!* Them *stairs!*"

She leaned heavily, sideways, against Miss Levin's counter, and, applying one palm to the region of her heart, appeared at once to listen and to count. "Feel!" she cried then in a pleased voice.

Miss Levin obediently felt.

"Them stairs," continued Mrs. Brady darkly, "with my bad heart, will be the death of me. Whew! Well, dearie? What's the news?"

"You got a paper," Miss Levin languidly reminded her.

"Yeah!" agreed Mrs. Brady with sudden vehemence. "I got a paper!" She slapped it upon the counter. "An' a lot of time I'll get to *read* my paper, won't I now? On a Saturday night!" She moaned. "Other nights is bad enough, dear knows—but *Saturday* nights! How I dread 'em! Every Saturday night I say to my daughter, I say, 'Geraldine, I can't,' I say, 'I can't go through it again, an' that's all there is to it,' I say. 'I'll *quit!*'

I say. An' I *will,* too!" added Mrs. Brady firmly, if indefinitely.

Miss Levin, in defense of Saturday nights, mumbled some vague something about tips.

"Tips!" Mrs. Brady hissed it. She almost spat it. Plainly money was nothing, nothing at all, to this lady. "I just wish," said Mrs. Brady, and glared at Miss Levin, "I just wish *you* had to spend one Saturday night, just one, in that dressing room! Bein' pushed an' stepped on and near knocked down by that gang of hussies, an' them orderin' an' bossin' you 'round like you was *black,* an' usin' your things an' then sayin' they're sorry, they got no change, they'll be back. Yeah! They *never* come back!"

"There's Mr. Costello," whispered Miss Levin through lips that, like a ventriloquist's, scarcely stirred.

"An' as I was sayin'," Mrs. Brady said at once brightly, "I got to leave you. Ten to ten, time I was on the job."

She smirked at Miss Levin, nodded, and right-about-faced. There, indeed, Mr. Costello was. Mr. Billy Costello, manager, proprietor, monarch of all he surveyed. From the doorway of the big room where the little tables herded in a ring around the waxen floor, he surveyed Mrs. Brady, and in such a way that Mrs. Brady, momentarily forgetting her bad heart, walked fast, scurried faster, almost ran.

The door of her domain was set politely in an alcove, beyond silken curtains looped up at the sides. Mrs. Brady reached it breathless, shouldered it open, and

groped for the electric switch. Lights sprang up, a bright white blaze, intolerable for an instant to the eyes, like sun on snow. Blinking, Mrs. Brady shut the door.

The room was a spotless, white-tiled place, half beauty shop, half dressing room. Along one wall stood washstands, sturdy triplets in a row, with pale-green liquid soap in glass balloons afloat above them. Against the opposite wall there was a couch. A third wall backed an elongated glass-topped dressing table; and over the dressing table and over the washstands long rectangular sheets of mirror reflected lights, doors, glossy tiles, lights multiplied. . . .

Mrs. Brady moved across this glitter like a thick dark cloud in a hurry. At the dressing table she came to a halt, and upon it she laid her newspaper, her magazine, and her purse—a black purse worn gray with much clutching. She divested herself of a rusty black coat and a hat of the mushroom persuasion, and hung both up in a corner cupboard which she opened by means of one of a quite preposterous bunch of keys. From a nook in the cupboard she took down a lace-edged handkerchief with long streamers. She untied the streamers and tied them again around her chunky black alpaca waist. The handkerchief became an apron's baby cousin.

Mrs. Brady relocked the cupboard door, fumbled her key-ring over, and unlocked a capacious drawer of the dressing table. She spread a fresh towel on the plate-glass top, in the geometrical center, and upon

the towel she arranged with care a procession of things fished from the drawer. Things for the hair. Things for the complexion. Things for the eyes, the lashes, the brows, the lips, and the finger nails. Things in boxes and things in jars and things in tubes and tins. Also an ash tray, matches, pins, a tiny sewing kit, a pair of scissors. Last of all, a hand-printed sign, a nudging sort of sign:

NOTICE!

THESE ARTICLES, PLACED HERE FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE, ARE THE PROPERTY OF THE *MAID*.

And directly beneath the sign, propping it up against the looking-glass, a china saucer, in which Mrs. Brady now slyly laid decoy money: two quarters and two dimes, in four-leaf-clover formation.

Another drawer of the dressing table yielded a bottle of bromo-seltzer, a bottle of aromatic spirits of ammonia, a tin of sodium bicarbonate, and a teaspoon. These were lined up on a shelf above the couch.

Mrs. Brady was now ready for anything. And (from the grim, thin pucker of her mouth) expecting it.

Music came to her ears. Rather, the beat of music, muffled, rhythmic, remote. *Umpa-um, umpa-um, umpa-um-umm*—— Mr. "Fiddle" Baer and his band, hard at work on the first fox-trot of the night. It was teasing, foot-tapping music; but the large solemn feet of Mrs. Brady were still. She sat on the couch and opened her newspaper; and for some moments she read uninter-

ruptedly, with special attention to the murders, the divorces, the breaches of promise, the funnies.

Then the door swung inward, admitting a blast of Mr. Fiddle Baer's best, a whiff of perfume, and a girl.

Mrs. Brady put her paper away.

The girl was *petite* and darkly beautiful; wrapped in fur and mounted on tall jeweled heels. She entered humming the rag-time song the orchestra was playing, and while she stood near the dressing table, stripping off her gloves, she continued to hum it softly to herself:

"Oh, I know my baby loves me,
I can tell my baby loves me."

Here the dark little girl got the left glove off, and Mrs. Brady glimpsed a platinum wedding ring.

"'Cause there ain't no maybe
In my baby's
Eyes."

The right glove came off. The dark little girl sat down in one of the chairs that faced the dressing table. She doffed her wrap, casting it carelessly over the chair back. It had a cloth-of-gold lining, and the name of a Paris house was embroidered in curlicues on the label. Mrs. Brady hovered solicitously near.

The dark little girl, still humming, looked over the articles "placed here for your convenience," and picked up the scissors. Having cut off a very small hangnail with the air of one performing a perilous major operation, she seized and used the manicure buffer, and after

that the eyebrow pencil. Mrs. Brady's mind, hopefully calculating the tip, jumped and jumped again like a taxi-meter.

"Oh, I know my baby loves me——"

The dark little girl applied powder and lipstick belonging to herself. She examined the result searchingly in the mirror and sat back, satisfied. She cast some silver *Klink! Klink!* into Mrs. Brady's saucer, and half rose. Then, remembering something, she settled down again.

The ensuing thirty seconds were spent by her in pulling off her platinum wedding ring, tying it in a corner of a lace handkerchief, and tucking the handkerchief down the bodice of her tight white velvet gown.

"There!" she said.

She swooped up her wrap and trotted toward the door, jeweled heels merrily twinkling.

"'Cause there ain't no maybe——"

The door fell shut.

Almost instantly it opened again, and another girl came in. A blond, this. She was pretty in a round-eyed, doll-like way; but Mrs. Brady, regarding her, mentally grabbed the spirits of ammonia bottle. For she looked terribly ill. The round eyes were dull, the pretty silly little face was drawn. The thin hands, picking at the fastenings of a specious beaded bag, trembled and twitched.

Mrs. Brady cleared her throat. "Can I do something for you, miss?"

Evidently the blond girl had believed herself alone in the dressing room. She started violently and glanced up, panic in her eyes. Panic, and something else. Something very like murderous hate—but for an instant only, so that Mrs. Brady, whose perceptions were never quick, missed it altogether.

"A glass of water?" suggested Mrs. Brady.

"No," said the girl, "no." She had one hand in the beaded bag now. Mrs. Brady could see it moving, causing the bag to squirm like a live thing, and the fringe to shiver. "Yes!" she cried abruptly. "A glass of water —please—you get it for me."

She dropped on to the couch. Mrs. Brady scurried to the water cooler in the corner, pressed the spigot with a determined thumb. Water trickled out thinly. Mrs. Brady pressed harder, and scowled, and thought, "Something's wrong with this thing. I mustn't forget, next time I see Mr. Costello——"

When again she faced her patient, the patient was sitting erect. She was thrusting her clenched hand back into the beaded bag again.

She took only a sip of the water, but it seemed to help her quite miraculously. Almost at once color came to her cheeks, life to her eyes. She grew young again—as young as she was. She smiled up at Mrs. Brady.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "What do you know about that!" She shook her honey-colored head. "I can't imagine what came over me."

"Are you better now?" inquired Mrs. Brady.

"Yes. Oh, yes. I'm better now. You see," said the blond girl confidentially, "we were at the theater, my boy friend and I, and it was hot and stuffy—I guess that must have been the trouble."

She paused, and the ghost of her recent distress crossed her face. "God! I thought that last act *never* would end!" she said.

While she attended to her hair and complexion, she chattered gayly to Mrs. Brady, chattered on with scarcely a stop for breath, and laughed much. She said, among other things, that she and her "boy friend" had not known one another very long, but that she was "ga-ga" about him. "He is about me, too," she confessed. "He thinks I'm grand."

She fell silent then, and in the looking-glass her eyes were shadowed, haunted. But Mrs. Brady, from where she stood, could not see the looking-glass; and half a minute later the blond girl laughed and began again. When she went out she seemed to dance out on little wingèd feet; and Mrs. Brady, sighing, thought it must be nice to be young . . . and happy like that.

The next arrivals were two. A tall, extremely smart young woman in black chiffon entered first, and held the door open for her companion; and the instant the door was shut, she said, as though it had been on the tip of her tongue for hours, "Amy, what under the sun *happened?*"

Amy, who was brown-eyed, brown-bobbed-haired, and patently annoyed about something, crossed to the

dressing table and flopped into a chair before she made reply.

"Nothing," she said wearily then.

"That's nonsense!" snorted the other. "Tell me. Was it something she said? She's a tactless ass, of course. Always was."

"No, not anything she said. It was——" Amy bit her lip. "All right! I'll tell you. Before we left your apartment I just happened to notice that Tom had disappeared. So I went to look for him—I wanted to ask him if he'd remembered to tell the maid where we were going—Skippy's subject to croup, you know, and we always leave word. Well, so I went into the kitchen, thinking Tom might be there mixing cocktails—and there he was—and there *she* was!"

The full red mouth of the other young woman pursed itself slightly. Her arched brows lifted. "Well?"

Her matter-of-factness appeared to infuriate Amy. "He was *kissing* her!" she flung out.

"Well?" said the other again. She chuckled softly and patted Amy's shoulder, as if it were the shoulder of a child. "You're surely not going to let *that* spoil your whole evening? Amy *dear!* Kissing may once have been serious and significant—but it isn't nowadays. Nowadays, it's like shaking hands. It means nothing."

But Amy was not consoled. "I hate her!" she cried desperately. "Red-headed *thing!* Calling me 'darling' and 'honey,' and s-sending me handkerchiefs for C-Christmas—and then sneaking off behind closed doors and k-kissing my h-h-husband——"

At this point Amy quite broke down, but she recovered herself sufficiently to add with venom, "I'd like to slap her!"

"Oh, oh, oh," smiled the tall young woman, "I wouldn't do that!"

Amy wiped her eyes with what might well have been one of the Christmas handkerchiefs, and confronted her friend. "Well, what *would* you do, Vera? If you were I?"

"I'd forget it," said Vera, "and have a good time. I'd kiss somebody myself. You've no idea how much better you'd feel!"

"I don't do——" Amy began indignantly; but as the door behind her opened and a third young woman—red-headed, earringed, exquisite—lilted in, she changed her tone. "Oh, hello!" she called sweetly, beaming at the newcomer via the mirror. "We were wondering what had become of you!"

The red-headed girl, smiling easily back, dropped her cigarette on the floor and crushed it out with a silver-shod toe. "Tom and I were talking to Fiddle Baer," she explained. "He's going to play 'Clap Yo' Hands' next, because it's my favorite. Lend me a comb, will you, somebody?"

"There's a comb there," said Vera, indicating Mrs. Brady's business comb.

"But imagine using it!" murmured the red-headed girl. "Amy, darling, haven't you one?"

Amy produced a tiny comb from her rhinestone purse. "Don't forget to bring it when you come," she

said, and stood up. "I'm going on out, I want to tell Tom something."

She went.

The red-headed young woman and the tall black-chiffon one were alone, except for Mrs. Brady. The red-headed one beaded her incredible lashes. The tall one, the one called Vera, sat watching her. Presently she said, "Sylvia, look here." And Sylvia looked. Anybody, addressed in that tone, would have.

"There is one thing," Vera went on quietly, holding the other's eyes, "that I want understood. And that is, *'Hands off!'* Do you hear me?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You do know what I mean!"

The red-headed girl shrugged her shoulders. "Amy told you she saw us, I suppose."

"Precisely. And," went on Vera, gathering up her possessions and rising, "as I said before, you're to keep away." Her eyes blazed sudden white-hot rage. "Because, as you very well know, he belongs to *me,*" she said, and departed, slamming the door.

Between eleven o'clock and one Mrs. Brady was very busy indeed. Never for more than a moment during those two hours was the dressing room empty. Often it was jammed, full to overflowing with curled cropped heads, with ivory arms and shoulders, with silk and lace and chiffon, with legs. The door flapped in and back, in and back. The mirrors caught and held—and lost—a hundred different faces. Powder veiled the dressing

table with a thin white dust; cigarette stubs, scarlet at the tips, choked the ash-receiver. Dimes and quarters clattered into Mrs. Brady's saucer—and were transferred to Mrs. Brady's purse. The original seventy cents remained. That much, and no more, would Mrs. Brady gamble on the integrity of womankind.

She earned her money. She threaded needles and took stitches. She powdered the backs of necks. She supplied towels for soapy, dripping hands. She removed a speck from a teary blue eye and pounded the heel on a slipper. She curled the straggling ends of a black bob and a gray bob, pinned a velvet flower on a lithe round waist, mixed three doses of bicarbonate of soda, took charge of a shed pink-satin girdle, collected, on hands and knees, several dozen fake pearls that had wept from a broken string.

She served chorus girls and school girls, gay young matrons and gayer young mistresses, a lady who had divorced four husbands, and a lady who had poisoned one, the secret (more or less) sweetheart of a Most Distinguished Name, and the Brains of a bootleg gang. . . . She saw things. She saw a yellow check, with the ink hardly dry. She saw four tiny bruises, such as fingers might make, on an arm. She saw a girl strike another girl, not playfully. She saw a bundle of letters some man wished he had not written, safe and deep in a brocaded handbag.

About midnight the door flew open and at once was pushed shut, and a gray-eyed, lovely child stood backed

against it, her palms flattened on the panels at her sides, the draperies of her white chiffon gown settling lightly to rest around her.

There were already five damsels of varying ages in the dressing room. The latest arrival marked their presence with a flick of her eyes and, standing just where she was, she called peremptorily, "Maid!"

Mrs. Brady, standing just where *she* was, said, "Yes, miss?"

"Please come here," said the girl.

Mrs. Brady, as slowly as she dared, did so.

The girl lowered her voice to a tense half-whisper. "Listen! Is there any way I can get out of here except through this door I came in?"

Mrs. Brady stared at her stupidly.

"Any window?" persisted the girl. "Or anything?"

Here they were interrupted by the exodus of two of the damsels-of-varying-ages. Mrs. Brady opened the door for them—and in so doing caught a glimpse of a man who waited in the hall outside, a debonair, old-young man with a girl's furry wrap hung over his arm, and his hat in his hand.

The door clicked. The gray-eyed girl moved out from the wall, against which she had flattened herself —for all the world like one eluding pursuit in a cinema.

"What about that window?" she demanded, pointing.

"That's all the farther it opens," said Mrs. Brady.

"Oh! And it's the only one—isn't it?"

"It is."

"Damn," said the girl. "Then there's *no* way out?"

"No way but the door," said Mrs. Brady testily.

The girl looked at the door. She seemed to look *through* the door, and to despise and to fear what she saw. Then she looked at Mrs. Brady. "Well," she said, "then I s'pose the only thing for me to do is to stay in here."

She stayed. Minutes ticked by. Jazz crooned distantly, stopped, struck up again. Other girls came and went. Still the gray-eyed girl sat on the couch, with her back to the wall and her shapely legs crossed, smoking cigarettes, one from the stub of another.

After a long while she said, "Maid!"

"Yes, miss?"

"Peek out that door, will you, and see if there's anyone standing there."

Mrs. Brady peeked, and reported that there was. There was a gentleman with a little bit of a black mustache standing there. The same gentleman, in fact, who was standing there "just after you came in."

"Oh, Lord," sighed the gray-eyed girl. "Well . . . I can't stay here all *night,* that's one sure thing."

She slid off the couch, and went listlessly to the dressing table. There she occupied herself for a minute or two. Suddenly, without a word, she darted out.

Thirty seconds later Mrs. Brady was elated to find two crumpled one-dollar bills lying in her saucer. Her joy, however, died a premature death. For she made an almost simultaneous second discovery. A saddening one. Above all, a puzzling one.

"Now what for," marveled Mrs. Brady, "did she want to walk off with them *scissors?*"

This at twelve twenty-five.

At twelve thirty a quartette of excited young things burst in, babbling madly. All of them had their evening wraps with them; all talked at once. One of them, a Dresden china girl with a heart-shaped face, was the center of attraction. Around her the rest fluttered like monstrous butterflies; to her they addressed their shrill exclamatory cries.

"Babe," they called her.

Mrs. Brady heard snatches: "Not in this state unless . . ." "Well, you can in Maryland, Jimmy says." "Oh, there must be some place nearer than . . ." "Isn't this marvelous?" "When did it happen, Babe? When did you decide?"

"Just now," the girl with the heart-shaped face sang softly, "when we were dancing."

The babble resumed, "But listen, Babe, what'll your mother and father . . . ?" "Oh, never mind, let's hurry." "Shall we be warm enough with just these thin wraps, do you think? Babe, will you be warm enough? Sure?"

Powder flew and little pocket combs marched through bright marcels. Flushed cheeks were painted pinker still.

"My pearls," said Babe," "are *old*. And my dress and my slippers are *new*. Now, let's see—what can I *borrow?*"

A lace handkerchief, a diamond bar pin, a pair of

earrings were proffered. She chose the bar pin, and its owner unpinned it proudly, gladly.

"I've got blue garters!" exclaimed a shrill little girl in a silver dress.

"Give me one, then," directed Babe. "I'll trade with you. . . . There! That fixes that."

More babbling, "Hurry! Hurry up!" . . . "Listen, are you *sure* we'll be warm enough? Because we can stop at my house, there's nobody home." "Give me that puff, Babe, I'll powder your back." "And just to think a week ago you'd never even met each other!" "Oh, hurry *up,* let's get *started!*" "I'm ready." "So'm I." "Ready, Babe? You look adorable." "Come on, everybody."

They were gone again, and the dressing room seemed twice as still and vacant as before.

A minute of grace, during which Mrs. Brady wiped the spilled powder away with a damp gray rag. Then the door jumped open again. Two evening gowns appeared and made for the dressing table in a bee line. Slim tubular gowns they were, one green, one palest yellow. Yellow hair went with the green gown, brown hair with the yellow. The green-gowned, yellow-haired girl wore gardenias on her left shoulder, four of them, and a flashing bracelet on each fragile wrist. The other girl looked less prosperous; still, you would rather have looked at her.

Both ignored Mrs. Brady's cosmetic display as utterly as they ignored Mrs. Brady, producing full field equipment of their own.

"Well," said the girl with gardenias, rouging energetically, "how do you like him?"

"Oh-h—all right."

"Meaning, 'Not any,' hmm? I suspected as much!" The girl with gardenias turned in her chair and scanned her companion's profile with disapproval. "See here, Marilee," she drawled, "are you going to be a damn fool *all* your life?"

"He's fat," said Marilee dreamily. "Fat, and—greasy, sort of. I mean, greasy in his mind. Don't you know what I mean?"

"I know *one* thing," declared the other. "I know Who He Is! And if I were you, that's all I'd need to know. *Under the circumstances.*"

The last three words, stressed meaningly, affected the girl called Marilee curiously. She grew grave. Her lips and lashes drooped. For some seconds she sat frowning a little, breaking a black-sheathed lipstick in two and fitting it together again.

"She's worse," she said finally, low.

"Worse?"

Marilee nodded.

"Well," said the girl with gardenias, "there you are. It's the climate. She'll never be anything *but* worse, if she doesn't get away. Out West. Arizona or somewhere."

"I know," murmured Marilee.

The other girl opened a tin of eye shadow. "Of course," she said dryly, "suit yourself. She's not *my* sister."

Marilee said nothing. Quiet she sat, breaking the lipstick, mending it, breaking it.

"Oh, well," she breathed finally, wearily, and straightened up. She propped her elbows on the plate-glass dressing table top and leaned toward the mirror, and with the lipstick she began to make her coral-pink mouth very red and gay and reckless and alluring.

Nightly at one o'clock Vane and Moreno dance for the Club Français. They dance a tango, they dance a waltz; then, by way of encore, they do a Black Bottom, and a trick of their own called the Wheel. They dance for twenty, thirty minutes. And while they dance you do not leave your table—for this is what you came to see. Vane and Moreno. The new New York thrill. The sole justification for the five-dollar couvert extorted by Billy Costello.

From one until half-past, then, was Mrs. Brady's recess. She had been looking forward to it all the evening long. When it began—when the opening chords of the tango music sounded stirringly from the room outside—Mrs. Brady brightened. With a right good will she sped the parting guests.

Alone, she unlocked her cupboard and took out her magazine—the magazine she had bought three hours before. Heaving a great breath of relief and satisfaction, she plumped herself on the couch and fingered the pages.

Immediately she was absorbed, her eyes drinking up printed lines, her lips moving soundlessly.

The magazine was Mrs. Brady's favorite. Its ries were true stories, taken from life (so the ed said); and to Mrs. Brady they were live, vivid thr in the dull, drab pattern of her night.

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